

THE GREAT AMERICAN FAMILY



By **LEE SHIPPEY**

THEY planned to produce the great American novel, but the stork came flying low. They had to turn to potboilers to pay for the baby, and hung out the white flag. But the stork couldn't understand signals and kept bringing them more babies, until . . . (continued on front flap.).

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By
Lee Shippey

... until they realized that instead of the great American novel they had produced the great American family.

This story records their hopes and dreams, their struggles and comedies, and they are so typical of the struggles and comedies of a million American families that often the reader will wonder how the author got hold of his (the reader's) own family secrets. Though mainly compact of comedy, the novel carries you to a startling conclusion which gives you something to think about.



LEE SHIPPEY

LUCKY indeed is the author whose first novel wins international recognition as one of unusual quality, and whose second adds to his standing both at home and abroad. Lee Shippey's first novel, 'Where Nothing Ever Happens,' not only won praises but still is selling in America, Great Britain, South Africa, Egypt, Australia, and New Zealand — throughout the English-speaking world — and his second, 'The Girl Who Wanted Experience,' has done even better.

The author was born in Memphis, Tennessee, but grew up in Missouri and Kansas. At the age of twenty, he was blinded, but his work won him a position as columnist on the *Kansas City Star* at a time when he had to dictate the work from his bed. Later he partly recovered his sight and served as war correspondent and foreign correspondent. From 1920 to 1927, he wrote for many magazines, freelancing across Mexico, editing a paper in Tampico, and then settling in California to earn his living by writing for magazines. In 1927 he became editor of 'The Lee Side o' L.A.' column in the *Los Angeles Times*. Besides his three novels, he has written a textbook, 'California Progress,' of which a first edition of 50,000 was printed for the schools of California.



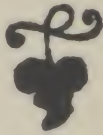
"MR. SHIPPEY writes with a certain wise charm " — *James Hilton*

"LEE SHIPPEY'S writings have great warmth of humanity, of sympathy, great zest of life. He loves people because he tries to understand them."
— *Rupert Hughes*

"THE writings of Lee Shippey always fascinate me. So does that don't-know-what-they'll-do-next actual family he creates. Ever meet them in life? NO? Then meet them in this book. It's the safest way." — *Max Miller*

THE GREAT AMERICAN FAMILY

LEE SHIPPEY



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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The Riverside Press Cambridge

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To

HENRY, CHARLES, JOHN, FRANK AND SYLVIA

I timorously dedicate this novel. And lest they feel outraged, thinking I have maligned them in these pages, I loudly assert that characters and situations are fictitious.

L. S.

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I—THE GAY FREELANCERS

THEY bought the place because it cost fourteen hundred dollars. They told the realtor (in California every real estate man is a realtor) that fourteen hundred dollars was their limit, and he obligingly showed them a place at just that price. Had they told him their limit was one thousand dollars he would have showed them the same place. For the only attractive thing about it was the view. The lot leaned against the side of a canyon, as if it had grown weary of climbing almost to the top, but from it one looked down a slope over which California oaks strayed like a browsing herd of peaceful and friendly monsters. The little canyon widened into a sheltered valley, across which they could barely catch a glimpse of the distant sea.

The cabin was built of redwood boards, unplastered on the inside. There were holes in the roof through which one might have thrown a chair.

'It isn't much of a house,' said Gregory, 'but if we're going to have a baby we ought to have a home of our own.'

'Yes,' said Sylvie, with confidence. For more than six hundred years Sylvie's ancestors had owned one farm in Normandy, and her cousins there still owned it. She felt you simply couldn't have a family unless you had a home.

'And the *realtoro*,' continued Gregory, 'says it won't rain here before October. It's only the fourth of May today. I can surely make enough money to mend that roof before October.'

'Of course,' said Sylvie. 'It will be just the place for you to write in. We'll name it Sans Souci. That means "without care," you know.'

Gregory looked at the holes in the roof. 'That'll fit,' he agreed. 'This place looks as if it hadn't had any care for the last hundred years.'

They didn't name it Sans Souci, though, for Kaiser Wilhelm had owned a castle with that name, and they couldn't imitate. They named it Weedlawn-on-the-Slope.

For four years Gregory and Sylvie had been drifting through Europe and Latin America, and Greg had written enough newspaper and magazine copy to keep them afloat. But their drifting had been a quest. They were looking for something which would inspire Greg to write a novel. Before they married Greg had determined to write one. But he had never found time to start.

When they learned that the stork was coming life became earnest again. They decided to settle in some quiet place and write that novel.

They decided that one baby was enough, and when it was born they hung out white flags on the clothes-line in the rear of the cabin.

With a baby, they couldn't take chances as they had before. Neither Greg nor Sylvie had ever worried about doctors, but when the baby sneezed they called one right away. They hadn't cared much before

whether life was a feast or a famine. They had found both interesting. But babies must be warmly clothed and well fed *every* day. Greg figured that he must have all bills paid and a little nest egg before he could lose himself in the novel, so he kept on writing short stories. And then good luck suddenly deserted him. Story after story which Greg had felt sure of selling came back. He discovered that a freelance's only certain source of food is a kitchen garden.

That was such an important discovery that it is worth noting. In New York and Paris and Mexico City they had thought life largely was made up of theaters, contacts, and *savoir faire*. At Weedlawn-on-the-Slope they discovered that nothing else meant half so much as their own little family, their work, and their health. They had no near neighbors, no motor car, and, most of the time, no money. Often before they had been hard up for a few weeks, but now months went by without a sale and dread specters flickered on the horizon of imagination. So Greg, who all his life had loathed routine, bought an alarm clock and set it for 6 A.M. He wound it tightly and set it clear across the room, so that he could not merely reach out and turn off the alarm and then go back to sleep. When it rang, he bounded from bed to shut it off before it could wake the baby. Then he flung on laborer's clothes and went out into his garden.

He had never raised anything before, but there were directions on the seed packets, and he knew all the thrills of discovering a new world. When they bought the place, the sellers had not considered the tumbledown house an asset, and had charged only for

the land, so they had half an acre of ground. And before long they had more radishes, lettuce, carrots, beets, Swiss chard, endive, potatoes, tomatoes, and figs than they could eat, and in that climate several of the vegetables would grow the year around.

There were times when, had they been sensible people, they would have worried sick or gone crazy with despair. One magazine for which Greg had written was absorbed, another changed editors, another died. And the baby brought a serious note into Greg's work, which editors had liked for its lightness and gaiety.

So the first rain, which the realtor had promised them wouldn't fall before October, caught them roofless in September. There was only one room ceiling which did not leak, and they rolled their bed and the baby's crib into that and huddled there until the rain was over.

Then Greg almost got sensible. 'I'm going to the city tomorrow and look for a job,' he said.

But Sylvie still had the good sense not to be sensible. 'You can't go tomorrow,' she said. 'I'm using the commutation ticket tomorrow. You must stay here and take care of the baby.'

Sylvie went, and when she came back she handed Greg forty dollars. 'You take that and buy shingles for the roof,' she said.

Greg couldn't speak. He could only look his amazement.

'A woman with a nursing baby has no need of a party dress,' said Sylvie... 'I haven't had that blue and silver dress of mine on for six months, and there isn't a chance that I could have worn it for another year. So I sold it.'

Greg took a three-day vacation from literature, which hadn't been paying anything, anyway. The roof of the cabin was very steep, and as one side of it hung over the canyon it was possible to fall a long way. So Greg went to the railway station and bought a three-day accident insurance policy. Then he went home, tied a rope about his waist, climbed the roof, tied the other end of the rope about the chimney, and shingled the roof. It was a most amateurish job. Good workmen smiled at the sight of it. But it kept the rain out.

During those three days Greg never walked the mile to the post-office for the mail. 'Let the darned rejection slips wait,' he said. But the day after he finished patching the roof he went for the mail again. And there in the post-office, like a reward for perseverance, was a letter accepting a story, the first he had sold in five months.

When they started freelancing at Weedlawn, Greg determined to write and mail something every day, even if it were only a two-line joke or bit of humorous verse, or a dispatch to a newspaper which might earn him a dollar or two. As long as a writer has something in the mail he has hope; as soon as he lets all his manuscripts roost at home he becomes despondent and discouraged. Greg had kept his hopes flying instead of in the home nest, until he got so poor that he had had to give up tobacco (temporarily) in order to buy stamps. So the sale of that story thrilled them as a reprieve might thrill a condemned man if it arrived just as he stepped on the gallows. It meant only one hundred dollars in cash, for the purchaser was not one of the best magazines, but it meant triumph and glory to Greg and Sylvie.

Two days later another acceptance arrived, from another second-rate magazine. 'Our aspirations are being ground to pulps,' sighed Greg, 'but the pulps seem to pay promptly.'

They went to Los Angeles for two days, and were much more excited about the trip than they had been when they went to Europe and to Mexico. They ate lobster, and the sweetness of well-earned triumph was in every mouthful. They saw shows with the joyous and ingenuous eyes of the unspoiled. They bought clothes — a few — with more sense of importance than when they had prepared for their wedding. Months of struggle and privation, of mutual encouragement and health and hope, had given them a zest for life which millions couldn't have bought — indeed, which millions could only have destroyed.

It was a hard life, but not too hard, for it maintained a balance between physical and mental work and physical and mental recreation. Greg and Sylvie were so fit that on drizzly afternoons when they couldn't take the baby out they loved to stride out together, wearing slickers, through the eucalyptus woods, walking uphill and down for two good hours. Far from being worn out by their existence, they were so much alive they felt playful. And they discovered that good books enjoyed together lifted both the heart and the soul to greater aspiration and understanding and unity.

Yet how they did enjoy it every time Greg sold a story, and they went to town to celebrate. First of all, they bought provisions for the coming month. Then they lunched at a good café and went to a good show.

Most of the stories sold for small prices, sometimes as little as fifty dollars, but one beautiful day there was a check for four hundred dollars, and once, after three months of bitter failure, a novelette sold for eight hundred! But the sales never came very close together. For only the 'pulp' were buying Greg's stories, and he was perpetually trying to write for the 'slicks,' so that many of his stories did not quite fit either.

So they were always poor, but always happy and proud of one another. Though they had to keep the white flags flying from the backyard clothesline they wore the red badge of courage in their hearts. But before a year had passed they were startled to find that the stork couldn't understand signals. It wasn't paying any attention to those white flags.

They decided they had to have a maid. And then the wind was tempered to the shorn lambs again. In the post-office one day a Mexican girl who could speak no English was asking for mail. Greg acted as interpreter. The girl told him she had come up from Mexico to live with her sister, and could get no work because she could not speak English. Greg told her to see his wife. So Guadalupe, skinny, tireless, hard-working and devoted, came into their lives for what they could afford to pay.

The second baby was born, and Greg resigned himself to writing 'formula' stories. The first and second babies seemed to postpone all efforts toward a book indefinitely. But when the third baby arrived, four years after they had moved to Weedlawn, both Greg and Sylvie realized they must lift themselves by their bootstraps. They were getting into a rut and losing sight of their aspirations.

Greg desperately went to work on a book. They

got so poor they had to let Guadalupe go and invite Grandma to come and visit them. But Greg kept on, grimly, stopping only a few times to earn a few quick dollars. For Sylvie tried to keep him from realizing how hard up they were.

It took a year to write the novel. A year's work. A year's sacrifice for the whole family. A year of struggle and hope and unadmitted fear. Was it to prove a year which would set them free from the monthly grind and uncertainty of writing potboilers, or was it to prove all wasted effort?

For six weeks they waited in such anxiety that Greg couldn't settle down to a short story. He mechanically wrote jokes and bits of verse every day, and sent them away, and rewrote two old stories, but he couldn't get into a new one. He began to wonder, with sickening, if he were written out. He knew writers who suddenly came to the point where they no longer had anything good to offer, and had read the work of many more. They could coast awhile on whatever reputations they had built up, but then they ceased to appear in the public prints.

Then came a week when no joke, newspaper paragraph, bit of verse, or anything sold anywhere. Sylvie told Greg he ought to take a good rest, but he could see that her gaiety was forced. Charles, the second baby, had been sick.

Friday, the thirteenth, arrived. Greg and Sylvie agreed it would be a lucky day for them, and Greg set off for the post-office. He found his box crammed with rejections. But no word about the novel.

That was just after luncheon. Ordinarily, he read his paper and wrote a few 'shorts' after lunch, and

then went out for a walk. But that day he was feeling too desperate to go out. Another mail came in at five-thirty. By working feverishly until five, he had three manuscripts ready to go out on that train — trivial things, but each might bring in a few dollars. He was at the station at five-thirty to mail them on the train, and then went to the post-office. If there was even a one dollar check in the mail it would change the whole complexion of the week. He had received a little check the Friday before.

One letter was thrust into his box. It was a square envelope, not one containing manuscript. It looked like an acceptance. His heart began to pound, but he waited until no one else was in the little post-office. He half feared that he would faint from joy if it were an acceptance of his novel — and die of despair if it wasn't.

At last he opened the box. The letter was from the publishers. It must be an acceptance.

He touched it to his lips, breathed a prayer, and opened it. Then he felt sick. The letter was very short. It said: 'We have given your manuscript careful consideration, and regret to have to inform you that it is not suitable for our uses. We are returning it by express, collect.'

Greg walked home in a daze. A year of work all gone. A year of hope and faith unjustified. He did not notice that the sunset was a miracle of glory. All his vision was turned inward. He was examining himself and finding himself a failure.

But all his family were out to see the sunset. As Greg came plodding homeward he was awakened from his bitter reflections by a dog's bark. Brownie, the faithful Neardale, was racing to meet him. Henry and

Charles were coming, too, and baby John was bobbing behind them like the tail of a kite. Sylvie stood waiting at the gate, and on the porch behind her sat Grandma. All were glad to see him. All were loving and happy. What treasure in the world could equal what he already had, and why should a man who had all that sigh for any worlds he could not conquer?

At that moment Greg's philosophy changed. He decided it made no difference what he did for a living, just so he got one honestly and found time to appreciate what he had.

That night he sat up and smoked another pipe after Sylvie had gone to bed, and this was the result:

First comes my dog, when I near home at night,
Leaping about me with unfeigned delight,
Barking as if to shout: 'He's here! He's here!' —
At which three tousled heads, heart-clutching dear,
Bob up from play and follow in his wake —
What horses could a race so thrilling make!
Five-year-old Henry runs, a little man.
Charles, shorter-legged, trots the best he can.
While, far behind them, toddling baby John,
Crowing 'Dada, Dada!' comes tumbling on,
Hurtless in great excitement. Still beyond,
Beside the wide gate waiting, proud and fond,
The sunset glory shining in her face,
Is Mother, their sweet minister of grace,
And mine, and on the porch, white, bent and small,
Sits Grandma, joying in the joy of all,
Serenely old.

Of cares it makes a mock,
That royal welcome, stringing out a block,

And all of that day's failure and defeat
Drown in a sunset-colored wave of sweet.
I know my unworth. My heart-treasured flames
Are but a small man's yearnings toward great aims.
I know I am a weak and little thing
In this great world. Yet then I feel a king,
Proud and yet humble, marveling that fate
Can give so much to one so far from great.
Hope thrills me, though my heart had seemed a clod.
Faith fills me — and deep gratitude to God.

He was only a small man yearning toward great aims. But life was very good, and the great aims gave it at least a faint tinge of glory. He would not relinquish them, but he would let practical toil come first, just as he toiled in his garden every morning. He had started the garden merely to raise vegetables, but he had raised health and knowledge and the joy of creation there. He had learned much and gained much spiritually without knowing it.

So time flowed by, like a singing stream, and Frank was born. Four boys! Surely that was enough for anyone to freelance for. Greg and Sylvie decided that four children were enough, just as they had decided that one was enough when Henry was born, and that two were enough when Charles was born.

But the stork didn't pay any more attention to decisions than it had paid to white flags. Less than two years after Frank's arrival it came again. But that time it surprised them. Instead of a boy it brought a girl.

Greg had imagined he didn't wish a girl. But that baby brought him a greater sense of responsibility than had any of the others. Boys could take care of

themselves, but he must make something of himself if he had a daughter. Hadn't he been getting into a rut, just because there was a thin streak of gold dust in it?

'We'll name her Sylvia,' he said.

'We might as well,' said Sylvie, 'for my name has been changed to Mom lately, and yours to Dad.'

That was true. Hank, formerly Henry, and Chuck, formerly Charles, had renamed their parents.

'By glory!' vowed Dad, looking down at the dreaming baby in the crib, 'as soon as I get out of debt I'm going to write something really worth-while.... But at a moment like this I've got to grind out quick-money stories mighty fast.'

And it is astonishing how a moment like that can stretch out into years and years.

2—GRISETTE THE HOUSE GOAT

SOME people can use credit to their own advantage and yet never beat anyone out of a cent. They are rare geniuses. We ordinary mortals generally find that what we establish as running accounts suddenly turn into jumping accounts. Three or four lessons had taught Mom and Dad that they weren't clever enough to keep running accounts from jumping. The only way they could keep from finding themselves bewilderingly deep in debt was to pay cash. When there was only a quarter in the treasury, they could pull something out of the garden and buy a quarter's worth of something to go with it, and Mom was clever enough to make the combination feed the eight of them pretty well, whereas if they had a charge account they couldn't possibly buy food for so many people without spending several times the amount in the treasury. Therefore they ran no charge accounts except with Hillmon, the dairyman, and Doctor Gillespie. For when there are five young children in the house they must have plenty of milk, whether there is anything in the treasury or not; and when babies get sick the doctor must be called right now.

After Sylvia arrived, they couldn't get along with less than five quarts of milk a day. And often they needed more, for when it was a long time between stories there were meatless days. When creamed

vegetables are the *pièce de résistance* you must have milk. So often the milk bill was as big as the check for which Dad sold a story.

That was why Mom listened with eager interest to Mrs. Miles Standish Maguire.

Mrs. Maguire was a kindly, affable, and talkative soul who came to see them now and then though she lived miles away somewhere out in the country. Mr. Maguire they never saw, and they never knew just how he came by his given name. But they had a feeling that he must have a hereditary trait which proved his title to it. He had secured a partner who would do his talking for him. But they genuinely liked Mrs. Maguire. She had been very kind to Guadalupe's family and other improvident Mexican families.

When Mrs. Maguire called to see Sylvia a dozen empty milk bottles were standing in line on the back porch, waiting for Hillmon. Mrs. Maguire eyed them judicially.

'Land sakes!' she said. 'You ought to have a goat.'

Mom's eyes brightened with interest. 'We've been thinking about buying a cow,' she said. 'But we'll have to wait until the boys get big enough to take care of it. My husband has his time completely scheduled — if he takes on any other job he'll have to quit earning a living, or taking the exercise he needs to keep fit to earn a living. And my time is taken up the same way with the house and the children.'

'Oh, no, you don't need a cow,' said Mrs. Maguire, positively. 'You need a goat.... There is nothing so wonderful as goat milk. I was simply wasting away. But I got a thoroughbred Toggenburg and practically lived on goat milk, and it simply did

wonders for me. Goats aren't any care at all. Once they are full grown they will eat almost anything. All the vegetable tops you throw away every day would be fine for a goat. Honestly, milking it every day would be the only real job you'd have.... And you and your husband could do twice as much work every day if you drank a quart of goat milk.'

Mom felt a little wistful. She had read much of the virtues of goats' milk. One animal like that would wipe out their milk bill. And Dad was so hard pressed just now.

'I — I suppose they're dreadfully expensive,' she said.

Then Mrs. Maguire beamed like Buddha. 'My dear,' she said, 'I'll give you one. One thoroughbred Toggenburg gives so much milk that I have no use for more than one, and we have a darling little lamb at our house. We've been talking of having it butchered, but I simply can't bear the thought of that. I'd be so much happier to give it to you.'

'Oh, my dear Mrs. Maguire, you are too good! You must let us pay something.'

'Not a cent, my dear. You simply can't tell how relieved I am to know that the dear little thing isn't to be killed. I'll bring it down to you this evening.'

Mom wished to run down to the room Dad had built underneath, where the house leaned over the canyon, for his workroom. But the law was that Dad mustn't be disturbed during his work hours unless it was because of something so important it wouldn't keep. Mom's news was important, but it would keep. Important! Why, it would be just like adding twenty-five dollars a month to their in-

come, and when a month came along when nothing sold except a few short things that would mean salvation. Maybe at last Mom could buy things for the cottage which she had been needing for years. She wondered if they might not break their rule and buy some things on the installment plan, paying twenty-five dollars a month. After all, it would come out of the milk fund. It wouldn't add a cent to Dad's responsibilities.

The Tempter lies in wait for women in that mood. Half an hour later, while she still was happily bemused, a car drove up to the house. Mom assumed it was Mrs. Maguire's car, and ran out eagerly. But a strange man alighted from the car. He had seen the white flags flying. He was selling electric washing and ironing machines.

Ordinarily, Mom wouldn't have let him in the house. But that magic morning it seemed the world had changed. The poor fellow was eager to demonstrate his machines, not because of any hope of selling them but just because he so enjoyed manipulating them. The bigger the washing or the ironing the more fun it was to him. Those machines simply turned laundry work into play. But when the slightest of hints was dropped that maybe the family was going to have twenty-five dollars a month to spare he became an inspired orator, a prophet, and a fortune-teller. If Mom staggered on without those machines, he could see her physical breakdown, her hopeless submergence in doctor bills, the destruction of her home, the dispersal of her children to orphanages. But with those machines health, beauty, opulence, and family unity such as was now impossible would bless the house. Instead of spending long hours in

drudgery, that time could be spent in carefree comradeship with husband and children.

'I'll tell my husband about it at luncheon,' said Mom. 'Come back after luncheon and I'll let you know.'

Mom made luncheon a little nicer than usual that day, and when Dad came up she had her line of campaign mapped. First she told of Mrs. Maguire's visit and the offer of the goat, with estimates of the savings and profits. Dad's eyes brightened and he joined in her enthusiasm.

'Say,' he exclaimed, 'a couple of months of that should enable me to buy a new typewriter!'

Mom's eloquence halted in mid-flight. But her thought was that men are like that, and the little resentment which came with the thought hardened what had been hope into resolution. She faltered for only a second.

'We-ell, ye-es,' she agreed. 'But a typewriter isn't the only machine which is needed in this house.'

'It's the one on which our living depends.'

'Quite true. But you already have a typewriter which does fairly well. Don't you think it should be my turn now?'

There was a hint of hurt in her voice. Dad was surprised, and thought it wise to lay the whole matter on the shelf. 'Well, I guess it is,' he said. 'But we'd better not spend any of this new wealth until we get it.'

But Mom was desperate. In half an hour the persuasive salesman would be back. His arguments would be incontrovertible, but Dad was Scotch, and it might be well to have him converted first. She smiled a

little wistfully. 'When I estimated that we would save twenty-five dollars a month or more,' she said, 'I began to think of things the house needs — things we really should have for self-respect. We need new linens of every kind — and curtains — and rugs — and furniture — and a little family plate which didn't come from the ten-cent store.'

Dad looked sympathetic. Those things didn't mean anything to him, but he knew that every woman wants them. When Mom and Dad were first married they had only a furnished room, but dined out splendidly whenever a check came in. Then they had gone to Paris and lived in a tiny apartment on the top floor of what had been one wing of the Palais Royal, where every stone was grimed with history. In Mexico City, with a sure income, they had taken a nice apartment. But they had never owned anything until they came to Weedlawn, and then all of their savings had gone into the house, which they had furnished catch-as-catch-can. Instead of beds they had bought bedsprings, sawed a two-by-four into legs for them, and nailed them to the springs. No potentate ever rested more happily than they did on those beds, but they had expected to supplant them with real beds soon — and they still were using them. Everything else was in keeping.

'Honey,' he said, 'I know you've been a heroine. Most girls would have kicked me out and got a real provider long ago. If we could just make some real money I'd be so happy to turn over enough to let you have a buying spree. I do hope this next story...'

Mom smiled tenderly, partly in sympathy and partly because she knew she had him. 'I'm sure it will,' she said. 'After all, we've done wonders to come

through as far as we have. We're like the fellow who ran ten miles at top speed and then jumped across the river — it's no wonder when you think what a start he had. After keeping afloat this long, in times like these, we should be able to swim the ocean. You'll get there soon, I know. . . . But just as I was wondering what we would do with our new wealth, a man came up to the house with something I want to show you.'

She led Dad to the wonderful demonstrator machines the salesman had left, and showed him how they worked. He was impressed with the fact that she could work them without ever having seen them before that day. 'It's just fun,' she declared. 'There's no work to it at all.' And it looked it. In fact, for a few minutes at a time it undoubtedly was fun.

'But how much do they cost?' asked Dad.

'Do we need to worry about that?' Mom asked. 'Here a saving of twenty-five dollars a month has fallen into our laps out of a clear sky. Why shouldn't we apply that money to the buying of these machines, no matter how long it takes?'

'By George, you're right,' said Dad. 'We'll do it.'

They were supposed to pay twenty-five dollars down, but they had only nineteen dollars, and the obliging salesman took that. Mom was so delighted with her new toys that Dad had to get stern with her to make her go out with the children as usual. But he was happy to see her so happy, and really it was a great day for the family — until Mrs. Maguire arrived with the goat.

It was a thoroughbred Toggenburg, all right, a dear little grayish creature one instinctively wished

to fondle as one would a pup. For it was only a baby. It was so inexperienced that nearly everything in the wide world startled it. Mrs. Maguire carried it in her arms, and could easily have carried it on one arm. As it looked about at its strange surroundings it baa-ed plaintively. It was no bigger than an average cat.

'Uh-uh — it — uh — isn't giving milk yet, is it?' asked Dad.

Mrs. Maguire laughed. 'Not quite,' she said. 'But it'll grow fast.'

The lamb baa-ed again, and Mom, used to mothering, reached for it and comforted it in her arms. 'It's a darling little thing,' she said, 'but ——.'

Mrs. Maguire had been a real estate saleswoman, and knew how to cut in with something convincing as soon as a prospect said 'but.'

'It's best to get them young and make real pets of them,' she averred. 'You'll find the children will make this one a real member of the family.'

'No doubt,' said Mom. 'We'll name her Grisette — little gray one.'

'Oh, that'll be sweet!' cried Mrs. Maguire. 'Well, I must go now.'

She was gone before they fully realized their plight. They had mortgaged their milk money for a year to come, and now possessed a baby goat which certainly could not produce any milk for weeks. Maybe not for two or three months.

Grisette had ways as winning as a kitten's. She wanted to be petted and expected it. She seemed to count on being a house goat. She leaped into Mom's lap and nestled there before Mom realized what had

happened. Mom was used to babies which had to be taught to walk, and here was one which could leap farther than could a ten-year-old boy, a toothless infant that thought nothing of hopping up on the table in one bound and curling up in Mom's big sewing basket. You could put a baby in its crib and let it sleep, but this creature expected to be fondled all the time — in fact, demanded fondling. If Mom set it down or pushed it away it bleated appealingly and took a running jump for another lap. Its foot-work was so rapid that its hoofbeats rattled like telegraph instruments.

'It certainly is a Laplander,' said Dad. 'As fast as you push it out of one lap it lands in another.'

Anything or anybody that wants to be petted all the time soon becomes a pest. The first hour Grissette was a darling and kept them laughing with her surprising antics. Then it was suppertime, and they put Grissette on the back porch. She kept up such a racket, bleating and beating a tattoo on the door with her front feet, that conversation was impossible. Then they heard her knocking down various things along one end of the porch. At a height of about five feet was a long box in which Mom's most petted flowers grew. They heard Grissette leap on the wash-tub, and then that flower box came crashing down. That was a tragedy. They rushed to the door, as if to slay Grissette.

'Here, confound you! Come in the house,' roared Dad, as he flung open the door.

Grissette had obeyed the order before he got more than half of it uttered. She went past him in midair. The next bound put her on a chair, and the next on the table. Mom and Dad rushed on her, full of the

fury fear inspires. They were sadly short of dishes already.

But Grisette leaped into John's lap, and John folded protecting arms about her. She remained there while they finished supper. Then she bleated.

'Poor little thing,' said Mom. 'She must be hungry, too. I wonder what she eats.'

'What did Mrs. Maguire say?'

'She said goats eat practically anything — grass and weeds and vegetable tops and peelings — just anything. But this one hasn't any teeth yet.'

They tried to interest Grisette in lettuce, beet tops, grass, mush, and, finally, a bowl of milk, though milk was the thing they rarely had enough of. They couldn't get her to eat anything, and decided she wasn't hungry. But Grisette kept on bleating.

There was a piano box in the back yard which they had converted into a chicken coop. Their first year at Weedlawn they had bought six white Leghorns, which immediately had stopped laying and made garden work their ambition in life. By that time Mom and Dad had become so fond of the chickens that they couldn't bear to kill them, so they had given them away. The piano-coop was open on one side, but would make a good shelter for Grisette, about seventy-five feet away from the house. They made her a good bed out there, and put her in it.

But quite plainly Grisette wanted to be a lap-goat. She loved company. She wouldn't stay there alone unless tied. So they tied her. She had rope enough to get a foot or two outside the coop, or to get back into its most sheltered corner, where her bed was, but no more.

'Once she sees we've left her alone she'll settle down,' predicted Dad. 'Let's go get some sleep.'

It was past their bedtime, for they had spent hours with Grissette. The children all had been asleep quite a while.

They went to bed, but they did not go to sleep. They held pillows over their ears, but they could not shut out Grissette's steadfast and pitiful bleating. They had to fight against the impulse to run out and see what was the matter. Just as Dad would drift toward the blessed harbor of temporary oblivion Mom would sit up in bed and whisper:

'What's the matter with her now? That sounds different.'

And when Mom, reassured, was sinking into a deep, sweet wave of sleep Dad would leap out of bed, exclaiming:

'She's strangling herself!'

Twice he pattered out, barefoot, with Mom following as far as the edge of the porch. The sounds which had come from Grissette were so choky that they expected to find her in the last gasp, but she wasn't. She was merely demanding attention.

They decided she must be hungry, and tried again to feed her, but evidently Grissette was on a hunger strike.

Then Dad got a long strip of cloth, and wound it around Grissette's muzzle so that she couldn't open her mouth. Grissette pawed at it frantically, but made no noise — or, at least, none they could hear once they got back in the house. It was two in the morning then.

'Now we'll go to sleep,' said Dad.

'Won't we!' yawned Mom. 'We know she's all right. Nothing can hurt her and she can't hurt herself. Good night.'

But their ears had been straining all night, and couldn't stop straining then. And just as Dad was about to forget there ever was a goat a faint yap-yap-yap smote his ears. He groaned aloud.

'Whasamatter?' asked Mom, almost drunkenly.

'Coyotes!'

They began to see murders in their minds. Many a morning they found torn rabbit fur close to their house, where a coyote had caught some unlucky bunny and left little of him. A kitten of which Johnnie had been fond had gone the same way. In all probability the bleating of a lamb would sound just like a mess call to coyotes.

'Good heavens!' sighed Mom. 'There's wildcats, too, in them thar hills. Maybe we'll have to take turns sitting on the back porch with a rifle. It would be better to share sentry duty than never to sleep at all.'

Just then someone came rushing up their front steps. Straight to the front door ran the startling footsteps, and then it was beaten upon.

Drowsy, Dad and Mom leaped from their bed, dazed, wondering, almost terrified. Who could be coming to their door in such frantic haste at that hour, and why? It was like a strange, agonizing dream, for still they were only half-awake.

Dad lurched downstairs, ran to the door, and opened it cautiously. And in bounced Grisette. Her hard little hooves had made all that racket. She had not been able to bleat because her muzzle was tied, but somehow she had managed to rasp in two the rope with which she had been tied.

They let her remain. Mom made her a bed in a chair beside the bed, but she would not stay there.

She bounded on their bed and skipped lightly from knee to knee.

At five o'clock they could stand it no longer. They could not telephone Mrs. Maguire, and she lived miles away. But there was an early-rising neighbor only a block away. Dad went to him.

'What have you fed it?' asked the neighbor.

'We offered it everything,' averred Dad. 'But it wouldn't touch anything.'

'Well, it's just a baby. Probably that night was the first it ever spent away from its mother. It can't eat anything but milk yet.'

'It utterly scorned milk.'

'I can't understand that. . . . Oh, of course you put it in a nursing bottle?'

'Wh-why, no. We never thought of that.'

The neighbor laughed heartily. 'Well, that's the whole trouble, then,' he said. 'Just get a nursing bottle and it will be all right.'

But Grissette wouldn't work on a nursing bottle either.

'Maybe we have to use goat milk in it,' suggested Dad.

'We will not,' said Mom firmly. 'It's more than twice as expensive as ordinary milk, and the closest goat is more than four miles away. You'd have to walk eight miles a day to get it.'

They tried warm milk and cold milk. Every time Grissette bleated insistently they caught her and put a milk bottle in her mouth, but she seemed to think they were trying to assassinate her. She fled from the milk bottle as if in terror.

The second day was like unto the first, and the

third day was like unto the second. Each of those days they wasted twice as much milk in vain efforts to feed Grisette as the children usually consumed.

The fourteenth time they asked the neighbor's advice he suggested that they make the holes in the nipple larger, so that the milk would flow easily. They made them so large that the milk would flow without any sucking on the part of Grisette. They could get milk all over her muzzle, but none inside.

They were frantic and Grisette was frantic. Deprive any baby of food for three days and all the strength it has left will be in its voice. . . . Grisette cried pitifully but incessantly. Yet her stupidity when the nursing bottle was thrust into her mouth was incredible.

They also tried to feed her with a spoon. But Grisette twisted and squirmed in terrified efforts to get her head away from any food thrust toward it, so that she and they and the surrounding terrain were flecked with white as if there had been a snowstorm.

Came the middle of the third night. All three were hollow-eyed and tottering on their feet. Grisette had grown quiet for a while, and that worried them. Maybe the poor little thing had grown too weak to bleat. Or maybe she had grown too hoarse. They tried to sleep, but listening had become such an unconscious habit that their ears strained, even in their cat-naps, and they kept jerking awake with a sensation of alarm.

They were almost relieved when a fierce, insistent, agonized bleating broke out again.

Dad bounded out of bed. 'By heaven!' he declared, 'we're going to get some milk down that baby's throat in the next five minutes. Come on, honey. It's going to take both of us.'

They had an old-fashioned lantern, which they lit and hung on the porch. Then Dad got Grisetette in his arms and sat on the steps. He got a firm grip on her muzzle and tilted it upward. Then he had Mom put the bottle in her mouth and hold it there.

Grisette did her best to get her head away, but could not. She choked. She seemed to be choking to death. But Dad and Mom were desperate, too. Mom held the bottle in her mouth and Dad held her jaws clamped on it so tightly that hardly any milk ran out. Grisetette strangled. Milk came out of her nose. They felt they were being brutal.

But terror and stubbornness and stupidity could not keep Grisetette from swallowing eventually, and when she did swallow her mouth was full of milk. Suddenly her struggles ceased. An ecstatic look came into her eyes, and she began to suck.

It didn't take her thirty seconds to empty that milk bottle. Her speed was incredible. They stared at one another unbelievably. Then Mom refilled the bottle. They didn't have to hold that in Grisetette's mouth by sheer strength. Grisetette reached out her neck for it. She emptied it with sucking so fierce that it almost amounted to a roar.

They gave her a third bottle — and then they were out of milk. Grisetette looked as if she would enjoy three or four more, but when they put her in her box she bleated in a low, comforted way and snuggled down for a rest.

From that time on, their difficulty was not to get Grisetette to eat but to get enough for her to eat. The goat they had got to reduce their milk bill to almost nothing grew amazingly, but soon wanted three

quarts of milk a day. For milk was the only thing she had learned to eat. She developed a fine set of upper teeth but no lowers, and they didn't see how she could eat anything except milk as long as she had no lower teeth.

She still wanted to be a house goat, but Dad built her a pen in the back yard. The fence around the pen was five feet tall. The piano box was inside that. It was as comfortable a home as any goat could wish, but Grisette had a way of awaking about one or two o'clock in the morning and deciding she wished company. Then, somehow, she would get out of her pen and come dashing up the front steps and beat on the door with her hooves.

They tried tying her again. But that was dangerous. She seemed to do her best to strangle herself with the rope.

One moonlit night Dad said:

'I'll hide out here where I can watch. You call "Good night" and go indoors and slam the door. It takes a lot of strategy to fool a goat.'

Mom carried out the deception as best she could. She fussed about indoors for about ten minutes, and then put out the light.

As if that were the cue she had been waiting for, Grisette scampered out of her house and around it. Then she bounced up on top of it, so swiftly that Dad's eyes could hardly follow her movements, and from that height went sailing over the fence.

After that life was one long contest between Dad and Grisette. He built fences she couldn't possibly leap, and she leaped them. In the middle of the night, when the household was sound asleep, there would be a clatter and a bang, and as the startled sleepers

came back to life it took them only a moment to realize that it was not a cyclone, not a meteor, not a runaway motor truck, but only dear little Grissette.

Sometimes Dad found she had contrived to get the gate to her pen undone. Sometimes he found a board which she had worried off the fence. But many a time he was completely puzzled. He suspected that some practical joker let the goat out and then latched the gate again. For no creature without wings could leap the fence which then surrounded Grissette's house.

One night they went to bed early, very tired. But just before midnight Grissette came clattering up the porch. The noise woke Sylvia and she cried. Dad caught Grissette, put her in her pen, saw that everything was tight, and returned to walk Sylvia to sleep, as Mom was worn out. He had just got Sylvia back in her bed when Grissette came thundering up the steps again, waking the whole household.

Then Dad played detective again. He put Grissette back in her pen and pretended to go back to bed, but instead he crept to a place from which he could watch every movement of the goat.

It was a long, cold wait. Grissette seemed perfectly content in her pen. Dad was so tired he blinked his eyes a time or two. And once when they were shut he heard a sudden clatter. He opened his eyes in time to see Grissette flying over the top of the fence, like a pole-vaulter.

He caught her and put her back, carefully examining the inside of the pen. Grissette hadn't exactly been leaping the fence. She had been climbing it. With a good running start, she seemed able to go up that fence as a 'human fly' goes up the side of a building.

Dad got hammer, nails and lumber. Clad in pyjamas and slippers, he built more fence, by the light of the moon. When he finished, dawn was breaking and he was tired, but happy. Never again could Grisette leap that fence. The top of it slanted inward, so that when she climbed that high she would be thrown back into the pen.

All this had taken months and months. But they still had to feed Grisette a lot of milk because she had no lower teeth. They were worried about that. Buying four or five extra quarts of milk a day for months and months was serious enough, but what if there were some physical deficiency in Grisette? What if she never got any lower teeth? They felt almost as does the parent of a deficient child. They did not wish to call attention to Grisette's abnormality by talking to any of the neighbors about it. But they decided that next time they sold a story they would go into the city and consult a specialist.

But extra money was scarce. They hadn't been able to meet the payments on the washing and ironing machines. Even when they had been cut down from twenty-five dollars a month to ten dollars a month they had run behind. For they had counted on saving on the milk bill, and the milk bill had been doubled. They had to either let the machines go or let the poor goat starve, and they couldn't do that. Mom was happy when the agent came and took the machines away. They had been a great help to her, but the worry over those payments had almost made her ill.

At last they felt they could afford another trip to town. They hired a woman to look after the children, and joyously went away. They bought forty dollars'

worth of grocery staples. Then they went shopping for clothes, for the children and for themselves. After that they would consult a veterinarian, possibly arranging for him to drive out and see Grissette. And after that they would have a good dinner and go to a show.

In the telephone book they found the name of a veterinarian not too far away. As they went to see him, a feeling of sadness came over them, for they realized more fully than they usually did the gravity of their problem.

'We have a nanny goat,' Dad explained, a little hesitatingly, to the veterinarian, 'and we're afraid maybe we have not fed or raised it right. It's nearly a year old now, and has a fine set of upper teeth, but not a sign of a lower tooth.'

The veterinarian grinned.

'Are you kidding me?' he asked.

'Not a bit,' said Mom, earnestly. 'It really hasn't a sign of lower teeth.'

'No,' said the veterinarian, solemnly, 'and I am sad to have to tell you that it never will have.'

'Do you mean we've done something wrong?' asked Mom, strickenly.

'Do you mean it's subnormal?' asked Dad.

'Not at all,' said the veterinarian. 'Goats never have lower teeth.'

Dad and Mom looked at one another helplessly. 'You mean,' said Dad, 'that they can eat without lower teeth?'

'They can eat anything and everything. Haven't you been feeding it?'

'Yes, but only milk.'

The veterinarian slapped his leg. It was the best joke he had heard that year.

'You didn't need to feed it milk after it was a few weeks old.'

They went away, relieved for Grisette but groaning when they thought how much they had spent for milk they didn't need. If only they hadn't been too silly to ask questions they would have been able to save the washing and ironing machines.

'It's spoiled my day,' said Mom. 'Instead of dinner and the show, let's go home and watch Grisette eat grass, and potato peelings, and carrot tops.' And home they went.

Grisette had not needed advice from a veterinarian. All she had needed was a chance. There was a fig tree in the yard which was the source of much joy and food. It bore so many figs that at times Dad had to pick them twice a day.

It was a big fig tree, and some of its branches twisted and turned down at the end as fig branches often do. One of those branches, unobserved, thrust out over the edge of Grisette's pen and then drooped. As the fruit on the branch grew larger the branch drooped more.

When Mom and Dad reconstructed the crime afterward they saw that Grisette must have leaped and caught that branch, and pulled it down until, with its aid, she could leap the fence. And then she proved to the world that she could eat.

When Mom and Dad got home they looked on a scene of havoc. The fig tree was nothing but a bleeding stump. The garden was a ruin. A Mexican boy, called in by the woman they had left in charge of the children, was trying to catch Grisette.

Dad's face went white.

‘When you catch her you may have her,’ he said. ‘I don’t want to ever see her again!’

Next day the Mexican family, as a return compliment, sent over a dish of roast cabrita. The children assumed that cabrita was some delicious meat they had never heard of before and enjoyed it. It doubtless was especially good, for it was milk-fed cabrita. Dad and Mom couldn’t eat any. Having lived in Mexico, they knew that the platter of golden brown meat was the last of their first great effort to save some money.

3—THE BEGINNING OF A FEUD

BLESSED are the genuinely poor but proud, for they shall win the earth away from those who inherit it. They shall grow up resourceful. Instead of feeling sorry for themselves they should thank Heaven every day. For in this land those whose pride makes them sincerely strive to get ahead rarely fail to do so, because they have so little competition. About eight young people out of ten are too careless or indolent or slipshod to steadily improve themselves and their work. They are too soft. They are content with themselves and think their work is good enough to 'get by.' Those born poor but proud, on the other hand, early form the habit of striving to improve themselves, and once they realize their work is the ladder on which they may climb high they improve that, too.

The Seymours were not exactly poor most of the time. Had there been only one child, or even two, they might have grown up soft and pampered. For it is an odd fact that a great many of the children of the comparatively poor are more pampered than the children of the rich. They spring from parents who are poor because they have pampered themselves, and are too indolent or inefficient to teach their children habits of industry, self-respect, and thrift. The rich may spoil their children even more, but they can

afford tutors or private schools where the self-respect which makes them wish to do their share as well as pay their share can be rubbed into them by a system free of the special privilege which has surrounded them. The main argument for the private school is that it takes many children out of daily contact with homes which are not improving them.

Had there been only one or two babies, Dad and Mom would have had a motor car. Had they had a car they would have driven their offspring somewhere every day, and at a very early age the offspring would have started to drive. They would have grown up as typical restless, dissatisfied, book-shy (and therefore ignorant) children. For Dad was too absorbed to give them much rearing, and Mom was too busy. But a new baby every year and a half costs just about as much as a new car every year and a half, with no trade-in value on the old one.

So the Seymour children grew up more self-dependent than most children in our fair land. They invented their own games, largely. They all loved reading, for they had been given picture books before they were old enough to read, and suitable magazines and books as soon as they could read. Their birthdays and Christmases always brought them magazines and books, until, by the time Hank was fourteen, the five children had three hundred books of their own, many of which had been read a score of times by each of them in turn.

They were so close together in age that they didn't have to look for companionship. They could always find either a playmate or a fight right at home. But most of the time they were pretty good pals, and often one saw Hank, Chuck, John, and Frank swing-

ing down the road together in search of adventure. That was how they became known as the twenty-mule-team quartet.

They were broad-minded in their companionships. Slick Gilkey was the toughest kid in town, but his parents, who were divorced, vied with one another in giving him presents he shouldn't have had. He was killing mocking birds with his air rifle when he was eight, owned a pistol when he was thirteen, and when he was fifteen, and large for his age, his father gave him a motor car. That gives some idea of the way Slick had been reared. He had a high and unrestrained temper, and frequently slapped other boys over when annoyed. But you couldn't make the twenty-mule-team quartet believe that anybody with all those romantic treasures wasn't a fine character. Indeed, they admired him more than they did Edward.

Edward was the son of Mrs. Morgan Waltham Willis, and was the one boy in Ourville who was named Edward and called Edward. Any other Edward would have been known as Eddie or Ed or Ned. But Mrs. Morgan Waltham Willis was an awesome person who sincerely believed that neither she nor her child was made of common clay, and Edward had absorbed the suggestion with which she surrounded him. Edward never had been permitted to go barefoot, as most Ourville children did, and at the age of eleven looked down on all children who did go barefoot. He never wore overalls, either. The Seymour boys wore overalls much of the time, and if you saw what looked like a brown patch on the blue it was likely to be just boy showing through, for they led such a life that often their clothes were torn. They were forever tussling with one another like a

lot of playful pups. That was hard on clothes, and their orders were to get into overalls as soon as they got home from school or Sunday school or any dress-up affair.

Edward had more playthings than anyone else in town, and the Seymour boys were willing to overlook his shortcomings and play with those things now and then. And if Edward had no one else to play with, which frequently happened, he welcomed them. But if better-dressed children were playing with him, he was frosty to the twenty-mule-team quartet, and if girls were there he was likely to be insulting.

Chuck Seymour had a genius for building model airplanes. He didn't have to buy kits or parts cut to measure, and plans for putting them together. Give him bolsa wood and one of his father's razor blades and he could carve out parts and build them according to his own plans, and they would fly. One day he built a plane of blue and white which was as lovely as a butterfly and flew about as easily, and when he flew it Edward saw it and grew envious. For Edward, too, had the plane-building craze just then. His mother had given him a 'studio' to work in, and every day or two Edward bought plans and kits of the expensive kind. Yet he had never built a plane which flew as Chuck's did. It had risen to a height of more than a hundred feet and was sailing straight, as if for a destination, high above the tops of trees.

Chuck was trotting after it. There were holes in the knees of his overalls and his shirt-tail was flying at half mast, but his eyes were shining, for he knew his work was good. For the moment he was an uncrowned king.

'Hey!' called Edward. 'You got a gas motor in that crate?'

'Naw,' said Chuck. 'Just rubbers.' He tossed the answer carelessly over his shoulder.

Edward tried to restrain himself, but could not. He ran after Chuck. The plane was beginning to descend. About a block away it came to earth as gently as a falling leaf.

'What'll you take for it?' promptly demanded Edward, as Chuck picked it up lovingly. Chuck blushed. Never before had he been asked to put a value on his work.

'Aw, I dunno,' he said.

He was all for dropping the embarrassing subject and going home. But Edward was insistent.

'Give you half a dollar for it,' he said.

Chuck stared at him. Chuck had never known a boy of eleven who casually carried that much money in his pocket. He didn't wish to part with his new achievement, but there was only about twenty cents worth of material in it, and it had taken him only two full days to build it, so the profit was pretty good. For fifty cents he could build at least two planes like that.

The deal was made and the two boys flew the plane a number of times. Then Edward invited Chuck to his home to see his planes, and Chuck was thrilled by them. Edward had plans and kits for planes he could not build, and Chuck was eager to try his hand at them.

'I can come over an' help you with some of 'em, if you want to,' he shyly suggested.

'Swell!' declared Edward. 'You come over tomorrow aft and we'll build this Comet model. I've had it for months, but never tried to make it.'

Chuck went home elated. He reported that Edward was a swell guy. Chuck had built a hundred planes propelled by rubber bands, but his dream was to build one propelled by a 'gas' motor. The model on which Edward wished his help, though, surpassed his previous dreams, the motor alone having cost twenty dollars. He dimly realized that Edward hadn't built the plane because the plans were too complicated, but Chuck loved complicated plans.

The next morning Chuck conscientiously did his chores and whatever was asked of him. But immediately after luncheon he called:

'Good-bye, Mom. I'm goin' over to Edward's.'

Mom flashed a look over him. She knew that Mrs. Morgan Waltham Willis frankly admitted that she was better than most people, and was often spoken of as 'snooty.' Chuck was barefoot and clad in overalls and polo shirt. The overalls were patched in several places but were clean. The shirt was beginning to fray about the collar, but it, too, was clean. And Chuck himself was clean. He had been dressed that same way the day before, when he and Edward had got along so well that Edward had asked him to come back, so her mothering eyes could see no flaw in her scrubbed and shining lad.

But when Chuck got to Edward's house, Edward was playing with a lovely little girl who was dressed as for a party. Chuck was very shy of girls, but didn't know if he had ever seen one quite so lovely before. Her face was framed in golden curls which were just beginning to darken. Her eyes were blue like a doll's. There was something exquisite about her poise, her manner, and her movements.

Edward, too, was dressed up. But Edward always

was. He never dressed as real boys did, not even in vacation.

Chuck hesitated, clothes-conscious for the first time in his life. But in his hands he carried a model plane he had built, and it gave him confidence. It was even better than the one Edward had bought the day before. He saw with delight that Edward had been showing the girl that other plane, and was sure he would be glad to see another one. Doubtless the girl would be glad to see it, too. Sylvia always liked to see him fly his planes. Yet he hesitated outside the gate.

'Hi!' he called, with a great effort at casualness.

The girl turned and looked at him. It was not exactly a stare, but more of a round-eyed, questioning gaze. Edward looked, too, and when he saw the plane in Chuck's hands he frowned. He did not want the girl to know Chuck had built the plane he had shown her. There was no recognition in his eyes as they met Chuck's.

'Who's that boy?' asked the girl.

'Aw, just a rag-tag kid from over by the gully,' answered Edward. 'Come on, Marion, let's play.'

He turned away contemptuously. Chuck scowled then. He had to scowl to hold back hot tears. But his indignation gave him a voice. This boy had invited him, had been eager for him to come. Maybe he was only playing.

'Wait a minute,' he said. 'Don't you want me to help you with that gas model?'

Edward did not answer, but grinned impishly at Marion and stooped to turn something beside the porch. The Willis lawn and the parking in front of it were equipped with a sprinkler system. Edward had

turned the key which turned on the sprinklers in the parking, and Chuck was standing where the full force of one sprinkler not only struck him but the cherished plane in his hands. And model planes are not made to stand soaking unless they have been waterproofed.

Chuck leaped back, but it was too late. He had been standing within a foot of a sprinkler. The water shot out with such force that it knocked the plane out of his hands.

To Edward it seemed a priceless piece of humor, made perfect by the fact that Chuck was rather small for his age. It would show Marion how clever and superior he was, to get rid of a bothersome third party in that masterful way. In a pinch, he could vow it was an accident — that he had turned on the water for some good purpose, without realizing that Chuck was near it — had accidentally turned the wrong key. But Chuck was small and outside the fence, so he laughed joyously and looked at Marion for approval.

Marion laughed, too. Her laughter was more discreet, but it hurt Chuck most. It seemed incredible that one so lovely could be so heartless. He was dazed and his eyes glistened, but a sense of outrage kept them from leaking.

He leaped after his plane, snatched it up, and tenderly laid it on the ground, safely out of reach of the water. Then, without saying a word, he walked around the spray to the entrance and strode in, with unmistakable purpose in his eyes.

Little though Chuck was, that purpose alarmed Edward to ferocity.

'Get out of here,' he snarled, 'or I'll punch you in the snoot.'

But it was Chuck who did the punching. He was more used to work than Edward was, his muscles were harder, his movements quicker and more accurate. He planted a blow in Edward's stomach which made him yell with pain and double like a jack-knife, and as he bent Chuck's other fist hit his right eye.

Edward ran for his house, screaming. Chuck turned and walked away, stopping to pick up his plane as tenderly as if it were a wounded thing, and sorrowfully went home.

He disappeared just in time to cheat Mrs. Willis of a chance to tell him what a vicious hoodlum he was, but she did her best to make up for it by telling everyone else.

That was the beginning of a feud.

Edward and Chuck were in the same class at the Ourville grammar school that fall, but not on the same footing. Edward was the teacher's favorite, because he was always well dressed and well mannered. The fact that his mother was a very influential woman may possibly have helped him a little, too. Edward's loyalty was all for teacher, never for his classmates. If Slick Gilkey brought a garter snake to school and hid it in his desk, Edward would scrawl a few words on a slip of paper and drop it on the teacher's desk, after which an outraged principal would give Slick a whipping. That was Edward.

He believed he was so clever about it that no one knew he was the class stool-pigeon. But no one is good enough as a politician to fool all of his classmates all of the time. It soon got so that Edward was keenly watched every time he went near the teacher's

desk, and glances of understanding passed between the watchers.

Chuck was innately conscientious. No matter how lessons bored him, he did his best to get them. But airplanes were the passion of his life. All the spending money he got went to magazines which told about airplanes or for material from which to construct models. His ambition was to grow up to be an airplane engineer.

When Chuck had given his other studies a fair reading he always had some airplane magazine or clipping or a blueprint to study. He did it secretly, folding whatever he was studying so that it would fit inside of one of his schoolbooks.

Every spring there were model aircraft races in Los Angeles, and Chuck dreamed of winning in those competitions. He had never dared enter, being too young and too shy. The winning planes, mostly, were built by boys in their latter teens. He had cherished the ambition secretly through his ninth and tenth years, and now he confessed it openly.

In Los Angeles there was a Mr. Vincent who, Chuck believed, knew more about planes than anyone else in the world. Whenever a point came up on which Chuck wished expert advice he hitch-hiked to Los Angeles, forty miles away. His parents forbade it, and Chuck was pretty good about obeying his parents, but in a case of desperate need he felt it was all right to make an exception. As he knew everyone in Ourville and most of the drivers for bakeries, laundries, and other concerns who daily visited the town, he rarely had trouble in getting a ride to the city. Getting a ride back home was harder, but he and Hank had discovered a place on the way home where there

was no traffic cop, but a button which any pedestrian could push when he wished the stream of traffic to stop for him. The moment after he pushed it the 'Stop' signal would go up and would stay up for forty-five seconds. Chuck would innocently lean against the post in which the button was concealed, while Hank looked over the approaching cars. When he saw one which gave him hope he signaled Chuck, who pressed the button. Sometimes they had puzzled motorists lined up for two blocks at an intersection no one was crossing, but they always got a ride, sooner or later.

One day after he had been saving his money for a month, Chuck hitch-hiked in to see Mr. Vincent and came home with treasures such as he had never owned before. They consisted of blueprints for a marvelous ship and materials from which to make it.

Chuck did not immediately begin building the plane. He wished to study the plans first, until he knew them so well they would be more his plans than anyone else's. He was aiming at an achievement which seemed great to him, which is as high as anyone can aim. He was as serious about it as Einstein could be about a problem he was working out. He lived with the thought of building that plane perfectly. And so, of course, he took those plans to school with him, to study in his spare time.

Edward could build planes which looked almost as good as Chuck's, but they flew heavily, if at all. He could buy planes Chuck could only dream about, yet jealousy was on his side rather than on Chuck's. And though Chuck told no one of the plans he was hiding inside his geography, the x-ray eyes of jealousy discovered his secret.

One day Chuck was studying his 'geography' with deep perplexity printed on his face. Suddenly the look changed to one of understanding, of discovery, of radiant joy. A deep, happy sigh escaped him, and he looked about, beaming, as if he wished the world he had been forgetting to share his happiness. His eyes met those of Marion Gale. She was the girl who had laughed at him the day Edward Willis had turned the sprinklers on him. But it was a big moment for Chuck, and he was willing to forgive anybody anything. His dreamy smile turned to one of friendliness, and Marion smiled back, almost eagerly.

At that moment Chuck was a Columbus discovering a new world. He was glad to have Marion share his moment of thrill, but he must get back to his job. For a moment he continued to look at Marion out of the corners of his eyes, and at the same time subconsciously saw Edward Willis go up and whisper to Miss Hawke, the teacher. But then his dream of achievement drove all other things out of mind and his gloating eyes riveted on the plans before him.

He was bewildered when Miss Hawke pounced on him. He was fiercely indignant when she snatched up his precious plans so rudely that she crushed them. But when she tore them to bits before his eyes he would have struck her had she been a man. As it was, he uttered one strangled cry and ran out of the room, fearing that he was about to burst into tears.

Realizing that she had done a cruel and spiteful and unnecessary thing, Miss Hawke tried to dignify and improve her position.

'Charles,' she ordered as he neared the door, 'come back here!'

Chuck ran on. She repeated her command just as he went through the door, for she knew he wasn't coming back, and his utter disobedience, before witnesses, was very comforting to her. It made it her duty to go to the principal and report that Chuck was incorrigible, and instead of feeling ashamed of herself she began to feel sorry for herself. Had she confessed her meanness to herself her self-respect would have been sadly damaged; so, to bolster it, she made the case against Chuck as strong as she could.

Thus an exceptionally conscientious lad was suspended, pending expulsion.

The teachers could fool themselves and one another, but they couldn't fool their pupils. Everyone in the class knew that Edward had tattled and Miss Hawke had been unnecessarily cruel. Even Marion Gale knew it, though she was Edward's close neighbor and special playmate. She met Hank a few days after Chuck had gone home.

'You sit right next to that Willis guy, don't you?' asked Hank.

'Yes.'

'Well, didn't he tell on Chuck?'

Marion hesitated.

'I think he did,' she admitted. Her manner convinced Hank that she knew rather than thought.

'Don't you think a guy that does a trick like that ought to learn a lesson?' continued Hank.

Marion nodded. She couldn't help nodding. She had sympathized so keenly with Chuck when his plans were torn that she hadn't wanted to play with Edward for days.

'Well,' said Hank, 'if we find a way to get even with him, will you do your part?'

Marion blushed and nodded again. Hank was three years her senior, which is a commanding difference when one is ten.

Hank sauntered on, whistling. He was in the little business section of Ourville, and as he glanced down an alley his eyes brightened with interest. It was rubbish day, the day Ourvillians put out boxes of rubbish which the rubbish truck would carry away to the dump. All kinds of curious odds and ends were put in the boxes behind the business houses. Once in the rubbish box back of Skipperson's Pharmacy he had found half a dozen slightly damaged Halloween masks. And often there were samples of things with which a fellow could have a lot of fun.

There was a big box of rubbish behind Skipperson's Pharmacy, but its contents appeared to be uninteresting. There were packages of herb tea which had been best sellers long before Hank was born but for which there had been no sale for years, and finally they were being discarded. There were a few most uninviting bottles and quite a lot of soda-fountain rubbish. But with persistence he did not always show, Hank delved clear to the bottom of the box. And there he found something he often had heard of but had never seen before — four little sample boxes of Copenhagen snuff.

The little boxes showed that they were very old. Hank opened one and sniffed it, and then there were three. That one sniff tore such a mighty sneeze from him that the little sample box he had opened was blown out of his hand and all its contents flung into the air. Hank sneezed and sneezed again, and his eyes watered. But they shone through tears.

A few days before the school nurse had sent him

home for sneezing only two or three times. She was so afraid that a flu epidemic might start in the school that she never took chances. That snuff had possibilities. He thoughtfully pocketed the remaining three boxes.

That was on Saturday. By Monday Hank had matured some plans. Just after the morning recess came the arithmetic hour, which was an hour of triumph for Edward. Edward enjoyed going to the blackboard and showing the others how to compute interest. The problem, 'If a merchant bought a suit for \$37.50 and sold it for \$55.00, what was the percentage of his profit?' could not only stump all four of the Seymour boys but Dad. Edward alone of all the class seemed born with a genius for the money-lending business, and Miss Hawke was very proud of him.

Gregory Seymour had registered such a protest over Chuck's suspension that the county superintendent was coming out to investigate, on Monday. Of course he would visit all the classes, and of course Miss Hawke would have Edward show off before him. When he finished the exhibition, Edward would almost certainly draw a clean white handkerchief out of his breast pocket and dust the chalk from his fingers. He habitually did that. No other boy in school could keep a handkerchief immaculate and uncrumpled for hours, but Edward was no ordinary boy. He was the only boy in the school, too, who habitually wore a coat and a hat. Most of the boys wore corduroys or overalls in summer, and their winter costume was the same with the addition of shoes and sweaters. Many of them had never owned

any kind of head covering, though most of them had straw hats for summer and rain helmets for the rainy days of the winter.

Edward wore a complete suit of clothes every day. He was the glass of fashion and the mold of form, but didn't have much fun. He wouldn't get down on his knees to play marbles, because that would soil his trousers. And he always carefully hung his coat in the cloak room when he went out to play.

With Chuck banished from Miss Hawke's room and Hank in another room, it would be hard to pin any crime on the Seymours. But that unguarded coat offered possibilities.

County Superintendent Samuels arrived just before recess, and during the recess was in conference with Miss Hawke and the principal, Miss Hedges. At the same time, Hank went into conference with Marion Gale on the playground, and when she left him Marion was giggling.

When the Ourville school bell rang, it was customary for the girls to march in first. Then, after a pause of about a minute, the boys marched in. The girls never caused any trouble, so the teachers gave most of their attention to the boys. Miss Hawke was not in the room but out in the hall when Marion marched in, and no one saw Marion stop a moment at Edward Willis's desk and thrust something into it.

When the class was assembled, Miss Hawke said: 'Children, we have a great honor this morning. Mr. Samuels, the county superintendent, will be in to visit us in a moment. When he enters, will you please all stand until he takes his seat, and then sit again.'

When Mr. Samuels, with Miss Hedges as an escort

of honor, came in the reception pleased him. He could see that Miss Hawke had a very well trained class. He took a seat and smiled benignly. Miss Hawke smiled confidently.

'We were just about to pick out some member of the class, at random, for an arithmetic test,' she said. 'Let's see. Edward, suppose you go to the board. And then maybe Mr. Samuels will favor us by picking out any problem on this page for you to do.'

She handed Mr. Samuels an open arithmetic, as Edward walked cockily to the blackboard. He took up chalk and waited, but Mr. Samuels had not yet made a selection. Edward laid down the chalk and reached for his immaculate handkerchief.

The handkerchief always was beautifully ironed and folded, and he always gave it a little shake as he took it from his breast pocket. As he shook it that day an almost imperceptible golden mist floated from it. Edward did not see it, but he sneezed violently.

He really needed the handkerchief then, for sneeze after sneeze shook him. A girl in the front seat joined in to make it a duet and then pupils throughout the room began to sneeze. Mr. Samuels started to speak, but a violent series of sneezes attacked him. Miss Hawke turned to address the class but only succeeded in spraying the first four rows. Everyone who had a handkerchief had the white flag flying. A cackling barnyard could not have been in more commotion.

Miss Morse, the school nurse, popped her head in at the door. Life for Miss Morse was one long fear of epidemics. When other schools had had to close because of flu she had saved hers, and that was her proudest boast. Sneezes, coughs, and runny eyes and noses were warnings she always heeded.

'What's the mat — ku-chee; Ku-chee! Ku-chee!' was Miss Morse's greeting, her worried question turning into something like a cheer given with vim any yell-leader would have admired.

She could not speak for sneezing. No one about her could speak. Edward was leaning against the blackboard, his eyes running, his nose running, his face flushed. Miss Hawke tried to speak to her but ended in a violent series of ka-chews. Mr. Samuels came hurrying toward her, so shaken by violent paroxysms that he lurched, and his face was purple. It was evident that escape was his desire, and Miss Morse did not wait for him. She fled into the hall, with Mr. Samuels in close pursuit.

Miss Hedges, after escorting Mr. Samuels to Miss Hawke's room, had returned to her office. But now, attracted by the noise, she came hurrying out.

'You better — ka-chew! — dismiss school,' cried Mr. Samuels.

Miss Morse dabbed her eyes.

'Yes — ku-chee! — we better take no chances,' she agreed.

So the whole Ourville school got an unexpected holiday, and it was decided, at a conference in the principal's office, to fumigate it thoroughly. But no one sneezed or wept during that conference, and Hibbs, the janitor, became suspicious. He went to Miss Hawke's room and opened all the windows. Then, on the floor near the blackboard, he saw some powder. He bent to examine it and sneezed as he had never sneezed before. Then he saw a handkerchief and picked it up. He returned to the office, wiping his eyes.

'It's sneeze-powder,' he reported. 'You can see somebody had a lot of it in this handkerchief, and shook it out.'

'Oh, it couldn't be!' exclaimed Miss Hawke. 'That's Edward Willis's handkerchief, and he's such a model boy.'

But when search of the room disclosed four empty snuff boxes in Edward's desk, Mr. Samuels snorted:

'That's the boy you should expel, to get the best results out of your class, Miss Hawke. As for model planes, my own youngest boy builds them and is learning more from that pastime than from anything he does in school — careful, painstaking workmanship, the beginnings of engineering and the principles of construction. Do you realize, Miss Hawke, that for thousands of years no one in the world could make an aircraft fly on its own power, and now every twelve-year-old boy can do it? I can forgive the boy who brought plane plans to school far easier than I can the one who flaunted his handkerchief so as to shake snuff in my face. I'm recommending plane-building in all our craftsmanship classes for boys.'

Poor Miss Hawke felt that her world was tottering. 'I admit things look bad for Edward,' she said. 'But there must be some explanation.'

'Explanation!' snapped Mr. Samuels. 'You and I both saw him shake his handkerchief in our very faces, the very handkerchief we now realize must have been loaded with snuff! There was much more reason to believe there might be some explanation for the actions of the other boy, Miss Hawke — the boy you suspended. We mustn't play favorites, Miss Hawke.'

The rebuke was so sharply given that Miss Hawke

trembled. Her accusing witness had lost standing, and the judge was prejudiced. And in ten minutes Chuck and his father were due to arrive to present their side.

'Edward's mother is a very powerful person here,' she murmured. 'Socially and politically ——'

'H'm!' said Mr. Samuels reflectively. It was election year. Then he continued, very sternly:

'As I was saying, we positively must play no favorites. Guilty though this Edward seems to be, we must give him the benefit of every possible doubt. But of course we must be equally considerate of the boy who was studying airplanes.'

Mr. Samuels had such a forceful manner that Miss Hawke and Miss Hedges nodded meekly and murmured 'Of course.'

'And it might be just as well,' added Mr. Samuels, with the urbanity of a master diplomat, 'to keep this snuff incident quiet. It doesn't pay to have any community laughing at its teachers.'

'Oh!' cried Miss Hawke, in a stricken tone.

'We shall!' pledged Miss Hedges, fervently.

But Hibbs, the janitor, went out grinning.

4—DAD SWEARS OFF SMOKING

WHENEVER the Seymour family grew desperately hard up, Dad's conscience smote him. He realized that smoking cost him at least ten cents a day. And he privately knew it cost considerably more than that. For besides tobacco, a new pipe was needed now and then, and pipe-cleaners were needed frequently, and every now and then a spark burned a hole in his best trousers or his newest shirt. Then, too, when he went to town Dad generally smoked a couple of cigars, and sometimes he invited someone else to have a cigar with him. So probably smoking cost him all of a hundred dollars a year. And every time Christmas came he thought what he might do with a hundred dollars. If Mom looked yearningly at an advertisement for a furred coat, reduced to \$89.75, Dad secretly thought: 'If I'd only quit smoking a year ago I could buy her that!' There was no comfort in reflecting that his own overcoat had cost fifteen dollars four years before. For women's coats are different.

After the experience with the washing and ironing machines he vowed never again to buy on installments. Some people could do it, but he could not. 'Credit,' he said, 'is a rope which saves some people from drowning, but give most of us enough rope and we'll hang ourselves.'

One day Dad walked into Skipperson's Pharmacy with a stern and determined set to his face, such as men wear when about to do deeds of daring or undergo tests of great endurance.

Lester Skipperson automatically moved toward the cigar case as he entered, for that was where Dad always stopped. But that day Dad lifted his right hand in a dramatic gesture of renunciation, and said:

'No, Les, no smokes today. Just a package of gum. I've quit smoking.'

He expected to see Lester turn pale or look alarmed. But Les merely grinned.

'Better take three packs of gum for a dime,' he said. 'We always make a special rate to fellows who swear off smoking.'

Dad thought he was joking.

'You wish to lose money both ways?' he asked.

'Not exactly,' said Lester. 'But we want to keep the trade, whether a man is buying gum or smokes. Because as soon as he gets over his swearing-off period a fellow always smokes more than ever. We may only make pennies on you while you're chewing gum, but we'll catch up when you start smoking again.'

'But I'm not going to start smoking again — at least, not for years,' warned Dad. 'You see, it's this way. My wife has always wanted an electric refrigerator. In the *Squeak* today (among ourselves, the Ourville *Banner-Sentinel-Enterprise* is affectionately known as the *Squeak*) the Ourville Hardware Company is advertising just the kind she's always wanted, and the headline was a challenge to any man's unselfishness and chivalry. It read: "You can buy this refrigerator which any woman will find a joy and comfort for only fifteen cents a day." Now, frankly,

Lester, fifteen cents a day is just about what smoking costs me. When I realized that for years my wife has been yearning in vain for something I could give her by merely giving up this selfish pleasure I couldn't help swearing off. It's going to take me two hundred and seventeen weeks to pay out. I guess that long before that time I'll be so cured of the smoking habit that I'd have to learn all over again, with sickness and suffering, just like a boy.'

'I doubt it,' said Lester. 'Smoking's like riding a bicycle. Once you learn it you can always do it. Well, keep plenty of gum in your pocket, and every time you want a smoke reach for a piece of gum instead. You may succeed in sticking to your resolution that way. I once heard of one fellow who did.'

Dad was a little disappointed. He had expected the announcement of his high resolve would arouse the druggist's respect and admiration, even if simultaneously it touched him with alarm and regret. For a customer is a customer.

Dad always liked to be very modest about his noble actions, but he liked to have other people discover them and point them out with pride. He went out thinking of Lester as an unappreciative sort of fellow who never had been entitled to the patronage Dad had given him. Daily contact for years had failed to give Lester any true appreciation of the magnificence of Dad's character. It served Skip right that his income was to be diminished by the complete loss of Dad's smoking business. And if others, stirred by his example, also turned their backs on the vile weed which rapidly was making serfs of most of the inhabitants of this asserted land of the free, that would serve Skip right, too.

But Dad said nothing and hopefully went home. At home, he knew, announcement of his sacrifice would create a sensation. His children would look at him in wonder, and his faithful helpspend would turn on him the light of eyes shining with understanding and appreciation. She would know that this almost superhuman thing was being done for her alone, and that though Dad was nobly quiet about it he had the same brave, grim resolution that nerves soldiers to go over the top, with wordless lips but with faces set and grim. He could imagine her first look of unbelieving surprise. But then, as she studied his face, the flash of understanding would come. Perhaps she would run to him, throw her arms around him and cry: 'Oh, Greg, you mustn't! It's darling of you, but I cannot let you make this sacrifice for me!'

But he would be firm. He would vow that he was doing it for himself, too. He would overrule all her sweet and loving protests. And in the end he would lead her down to the Ourville Hardware Company to pick out just the electric refrigerator she wished.

Doubtless her pride then would be so great that she would tell the salesman, and practically everyone she met, how she was getting that refrigerator, and soon the story would be all over town, making all other wives envious and all other men uncomfortable. But Dad wouldn't tell anyone about it himself. Modesty was to be his watchword.

Mom and the children were all sitting on the porch when he got home. As he was coming from the post-office, Mom always shot a glance at his pockets to see if they bulged with large envelopes which might

contain rejected manuscripts. But Dad had only the village newspaper in his hands, and a mysterious smile on his lips. He was trying so hard to look casual and careless that Mom knew he had something of great moment to say.

There was a low book table just before her, and on that he spread the *Ourville Banner-Sentinel-Enterprise*, opened to an inside page.

'See anything there which interests you?' he asked.

Mom stared at the page. Two thirds of it was filled with the advertisement of the Ourville Hardware Company, but the remainder was short local news items. If Mom hadn't been looking for something special the illustrated advertisement would have caught her eyes first of all. But nothing was farther from her mind than the idea that Greg could buy her anything valuable at that time, so she studied only the news items.

'I see that Edward Willis has a broken arm,' she said, a little anxiously. 'You don't think our boys did it, do you?'

'No, no, no, no!' said Dad. 'Look at the ad.'

Mom studied it then. She was puzzled at first. But when she looked at Dad a bright but unbelieving hope, like that of a child listening to a fairy story, came into her face. Unwilling to break the spell, she questioned him only with her eyes. All the children, too, were staring in curiosity. Dad felt that the psychological moment for his dramatic announcement had come.

'You may go down tomorrow and pick out your refrigerator,' he said, with forced calm. 'I have decided to quit smoking and invest the fifteen cents a day in the refrigerator.'

'You really mean it?' asked Mom, still unconvinced.

'Certainly I mean it. As insurance I've filled my pockets with gum. When I feel tempted to smoke now I'll just chew gum instead.'

He had expected his announcement to create a sensation, and it did. The children suddenly arose from the floor, where they had been playing marbles, and swept toward him like surf.

'Oh, Dad,' they cried, 'let's see the gum!'

Three packages of gum was more than Dad ever before had possessed at one time. He felt like a gum millionaire. In his childhood gum-chewing had been frowned on as a vulgarism. He had endeavored to pass that idea on to his children, but without success. There was a machine in front of Skipperson's Pharmacy from which, if one inserted a penny in the slot, a little marble-like ball of gum came. Occasionally when he had pennies he didn't need for stamps, Dad would give them to the children, who would promptly put them in that machine. But Dad's prejudice against gum, coupled with the vicissitudes of freelancing, made those occasions infrequent enough to make the children look on gum as a treat.

Dad was feeling generous that day. He had such a wealth of gum that he could afford to be generous. He gave each of them a piece.

'Is that the only kind you got?' asked John. 'Let's see the others.'

They dived into Dad's pockets and got out all the gum. But Dad grew stern. 'Not until after dinner,' he declared. 'One piece apiece now is plenty.'

Every member of the family was fond of reading.

Even Sylvia, who was not old enough to read, liked to lie in her bed and look at picture books, because it made her feel that she was doing what her brothers did. When the brothers were babies, Mom had liked to go to bed early after a tiring day and, lying there, read aloud to Dad. So the brothers had imbibed the reading habit with their mother's milk, almost. As they grew older it had proved a blessing. There was a reading light over every bed. Shortly after dinner they were all willing to go to bed, not to sleep but to read, and a hush fell over the house which had been noisy a few minutes before.

That night generous Dad gave each of them a piece of gum to go to bed with.

Then came the moment of trial. For years, that had been the time when Mom switched on the reading light and took up some beloved book, while Dad relaxed in his shabby but most comfortable rocker, draped his slippered feet over a stool — and lit his pipe.

Dazzled by the beauty and brightness of his new resolution, he had got along pretty well until then. But then such a sharp and commanding desire to smoke swept over him that he caught his breath in alarm. Unconsciously, he had almost yielded to it before he remembered his vow. His fingers had started reaching for the pipe and the pouch without waiting for instructions from his brain.

He sat up with a jerk and thrust a hand into a pocket in search of gum. He found no gum there. Then he searched his other pockets. There were empty wrappers which had contained gum, but not a stick of gum remained. Before he had realized it, the children had got it all.

He had never liked gum. But now it seemed that he was overboard without a life-preserver. He had put his faith in gum rather than in his own strength. Gum was going to banish habit and temptation. Gum was to be his bulwark against a nagging desire as insistent as the surf. Strong as he was (he thought) he could not fend it off hour after hour without assistance. There would be surprise attacks which would catch him napping. His hands would go creeping out for pipe and tobacco and matches in moments when he was off guard.

Mom started reading 'While Rome Burns.' They had begun the book the night before and been both charmed and delighted. It had taken them back to places in Paris which they knew and loved. It is only those things people enjoy together or endure together which make comrades of them, and when the writing of any master takes hold of two people they experience comradeship to the uttermost. The lives of Mom and Dad had been fairly knitted together by strands of strength and beauty from good books. It is human to be drawn to those who like what we do, who respond to the same ideals and strive toward the same standards. Instead of merely going to dances and amusement parks and shows together, there should be a law compelling all courting couples to read a few good books together. Then they will know whether or not they are spiritually in harmony.

But that night Dad sat with grim visage and wandering mind. When Mom looked up from the book with eyes glowing with appreciation, expecting to exchange with him a look which would blend their feelings, he was staring off into space. Absorbed in the book, she had for the time forgotten Dad's resolu-

tion, and now began watching him covertly and anxiously. What could have gone so wrong as to make Dad look like that? He was nervous. His hands were starting to creep out toward the table beside him, and then were jerking back. And he wasn't half hearing what she read.

There was such a yearning look in his eyes that her heart grew tender at once. Was it because there was dawning on his mind an idea of such exquisite beauty that he could regard it only with tears from the depths of some divine despair? Was it because the grace and deftness and effectiveness of what she was reading to him made him dissatisfied with his own work that day? Dad would much rather go back to 'Little White Bird' and weep over it for the fiftieth time than read the latest literary sensation unless the writing of the latter took hold of him. He tried to keep up with all the new books which were exquisitely done, but cared not a rap for any others. But often the perfection of what he read made him moodily dissatisfied with what he was writing. Once, after reading Conrad's great story, 'The Duel,' he had torn to bits a story of his own which probably would have sold to a magazine which wished 'punch' rather than art. His appreciation of splendid work was so keen that often it almost cut his heart in two.

Mom studied his face with concealed concern. There was brooding in it, but a faint glimmer of vague hope. She sat up and leaned toward him, drawing his head toward her shoulder and pressing her cheek to his.

'Tell me, dearest,' she whispered.

'We-e-ell,' said Dad, hesitatingly, 'when a man swears off for four whole years, I suppose it is the

spirit, not the letter, of the vow which counts most. Now and then an occasion will arise in which common courtesy demands that an exception to the rule be made. And, just at the beginning, there will be times, now and then, when a fellow runs out of gum.'

Mom abruptly removed her arm and her cheek.

'What are you driving at?' she demanded.

'Well, the children... uh... I thought I had plenty... It's my fault, of course... But I sort of relied on gum, and now it's all gone. I thought maybe, in view of ——'

'Oh, go ahead and smoke!' exclaimed Mom disgustedly.

For two weeks Dad had been confidently expecting a check for a story he had written on order. It was to be a four-hundred-dollar check, and they needed it badly. But next day the story came back, instead of the check.

'This is a little too fine-haired for us,' frankly wrote the editor. 'We still can use it if you'll put some he-man guts into it. If you would only write to our formula instead of going highbrow you could get somewhere. Last month we paid Walt Coburn, the cowboy author, fifteen hundred bucks for a thirty-thousand word novelette, and one grand for a ten-thousand worder. A guy who can write as good as you can could make some dough out of this business if you'd only give our clients what they want instead of what you want. Of course, only one in a million can be a Coburn. Coburn knows his stuff, always has a story and tells it damned well. That's why we have to have at least one Coburn story a month in each of our four magazines, and pay him four times

our regular rates. Can't you learn anything from that?'

It was crushing and infuriating, too. Dad wished to shoot any editor who asked him to write 'formula' stories. Of course he couldn't write like Coburn, any more than Coburn could write as he could. The only way a man could give the world anything worthwhile was by being himself, not by trying to imitate someone else. Couldn't the fool see that that was what Coburn was doing? Coburn was a genius in his line, but it was a line in which Dad did not fit.

But he must make himself fit that line. There was money in it, and he had to have money. He had seven mouths to feed and he wasn't quite good enough for the 'slicks.' He wouldn't tell Mom about that rejection. It would only worry her. But he would turn it into a 'formula' story or die trying.

He went into his workroom and bolted the door. Then, with a note pad under his right hand, he began rereading his story gloweringly.

He was so absorbed in it that he really did not know it when old habit guided his hand to his pipe and tobacco. The place was thick with fog before he remembered his vow.

'Oh, well,' he told himself, 'I swore off to save money, not for any other reason. And this tobacco is already bought and paid for. I might as well smoke it up.'

When he went to the post-office late in the afternoon he bought six packages of gum. But a precedent had been established. When he got home the children all asked for gum, and he couldn't refuse them. With six packages in his pocket he could afford to be

generous. So again, when the time for the easy chair and the good book came, he was gumless and restless and unsatisfied.

'I might as well smoke up what tobacco I have on hand,' he told Mom. 'That isn't going to interfere with payments on your electric refrigerator.'

Mom kept her face behind the book she had opened.

'No,' she said briefly.

'By the way, did you go down and select your refrigerator yet?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Well... I thought I'd wait and see whether you really could swear off or not.'

'Of course I mean it. You must select your refrigerator tomorrow.'

But Mom didn't select it the next day, and Dad's mind was in such a stew that he forgot about it. He also did a little smoking. For a week he worked grimly and determinedly, like a surgeon operating on a child he loved.

Mom didn't know what he was doing. She only knew that he was battling with strain and needed relaxation when he rested from the battle. So she rather encouraged him to smoke. And it was a long, long time before she got her electric refrigerator.

5—BROWNIE, THE FAITHFUL NEARDALE

LOOKING down the canyon from their house, the Seymours could see the ocean, and when they looked up the canyon the horizon was foreshortened by the mountains. By the time Hank was fourteen and Frank nearly nine, every member of the twenty-mule-team quartet had explored the trails in both directions. Indeed, there were few places within forty miles those lads had not explored, for by that time all of them had bicycles, and all of them had thumbs. Despite Mom's fears and Dad's stern orders, the boys would hitch-hike when anything was going on which they wished to see. They seemed to think that every American boy was born with the right to ride in motor cars, and if Dad didn't have one they had a perfect right to thumb their way on someone else's.

They could walk as well as thumb and pedal, and knew all the trails up Mount Wilson intimately. There even the United States mail was carried burro-back, as were all the provisions for the camps 'inside.' One couldn't hike for three miles up any of those trails without meeting a pack train, winding down the narrow trail just as pack trains did a hundred years ago. Only two miles up the trail was a camp at which there were half a dozen caged wildcats, and

five miles up was another camp to the door of which was nailed the hide of a mountain lion which had been killed there. There was a beautiful, clear stream up there, a waterfall a hundred feet tall and a lake, formed by a dam, in which there were said to be fish. To the boys, it was the realm of romance. Yet it was so close to civilization that the foot of the trails could be reached by street-car.

They even preferred hiking up the mountain to going to Sunday school, and now and then were given permission to start early on Sunday for an all-day hike. Here and there along the trail were camp stoves, placed in clearings by the Forest Rangers, where hikers could do either plain or fancy camp cooking. Often Mom and Dad and Sylvia, as well as the boys, hiked to the waterfall, a distance of seven miles one way from the end of the car line. There were places where the trail was only two feet wide, and edged precipices as tall as a ten-story building, and the first time they hiked up there all of them crept past such places. But by the time Sylvia was seven years old all of them had hiked the trail so often that it was hard to keep the children from romping and playing tricks on one another in even the most dangerous places.

To Brownie, the Neardale, those hikes were seventh heaven. He could spend hours in dashing importantly through the brush, as if just about to pounce on quarry of great value. He never caught anything but wood ticks, but he always came home redolent of blue sage, perfumed from tip to tip yet able to hold up his head and his stub tail in any company.

Often in the winter when it rained on Weedlawn they could see that snow was falling on the mountain.

And to Southern California children, snow always was a thrill. Indeed it was to Mom and Dad, too, for they could never get used to the contrasts of the climate. The first time they saw that snow was falling on the mountain, while roses were in bloom in their own yard, they put on raincoats and set out to see if it was real. The rain which fell on them as they started up the trail was soft and warm, refreshing to the earth. Birds were darting about in it, apparently joyous because of it. Flowers bowed to it, but brightened as they bowed. Near the foot of the trail an orange tree, gleaming with 'the golden apples of the Hesperides,' leaned over a fence, and Dad plucked one of the oranges. And then they started up the trail which only man or beast could climb, as there was no room for wheeled vehicles.

In three miles the trail gained four thousand feet in altitude. It was hard but joyous hiking, and the rain still was only cold enough to be refreshing. And then suddenly they turned a corner of the trail and were in snow. The change was so abrupt that they could stand twenty feet apart, one of them in rain and one in snow. They could almost step out of one into the other, for as they turned that corner in the trail they were in a different current of air which changed the rain to snow.

A little farther on the snow was so deep they could snowball, build a snowman, freeze their fingers. In the canyon below them every pine branch was all white above, all green below, the whole forest decorated as if for Christmas.

Then, still only half believing, they walked down the trail again, to roses and gleaming fruit trees — walked from winter to summer in an hour.

And in summer, when they lived in a land of absolute drought, kept green only by irrigation, they could walk up the mountain to cool moss and millions of wild flowers and singing streams.

It is not astonishing that sometimes the Seymour boys preferred going up the mountain to going to Sunday school.

One morning they were dutifully starting out for Sunday school when Hank pointed at the peak of the mountain. The sun was shining gloriously, and up there a silver shield flung back all its arrows of light. Snow!

'Aw, Mom,' said Hank, 'can't we ditch Sunday school today and go up there?'

'That's clear on top,' said Dad. 'Nine miles up the trail. That means eighteen miles of hard climbing up and down. I can't spare all that time.'

'And I've got such a good dinner, too,' said Mom. 'I think we have as fine a leg of lamb as I ever saw.'

But they were only temporizing. It was the first snow of the season, and they hadn't the heart to say no. In a few minutes Mom was in the kitchen, making sandwiches. And soon the boys set off, each with a packet tied to his belt. Brownie the Neardale joyously accompanied them.

Sylvia represented the family at Sunday school, and returned after Sunday school accompanied by a little girl named Betty, who asked if Sylvia might go to her house for dinner. That left Dad and Mom alone, and it seemed hardly worth-while to serve a regular dinner for two. They went out in the yard to look at Mom's flowers, got to working about them, and didn't bother about dinner, though the fine leg

of lamb was cooking. As they worked in the crisp air and grew hungry, odors from it came out the kitchen window and filled them with ecstasy. But when they went in for lunch the leg of lamb looked so perfect that they hadn't the heart to cut it for only themselves. They would save it for dinner that evening, so the whole family could enjoy it. They made up a couple of sandwiches apiece for themselves and let it go at that.

And they were glad of it when the Bransoms dropped in.

The Bransoms were not old friends of the family, but Clara Bransom had known Dad when both were young and romantic. Dad then was an impetuous youth who wrote poetry, but had no job, and Clara's mother decided it was a good time to take her on a trip to Europe. Clara's father was a stockbroker, and couldn't get away, but her mother unselfishly offered to conduct Clara personally by herself. On that trip, Clara had met Hervey Bransom, scion of wealth. Hervey and Clara had seen Venice together, and become engaged.

That had been nearly twenty years ago. But Mom, who placed a much higher value on Dad than anyone else did, always remembered, when she thought of Clara, that you may shatter the vase as you will, but the scent of the roses will cling 'round it still. The Bransoms lived in splendor in Los Angeles, and Mrs. Hervey Bransom's picture frequently appeared in the society pages. Mom was a womanly woman. She got secret satisfaction from the idea that though Clara Bransom had a great deal which she could never have, it was Clara who had the greater cause for envy. That was the most flattering thing anyone had ever thought

of Dad, and he could not altogether discourage the idea.

The Bransoms had invited them in for a week-end, and they had regretted that they could not leave the five children that long. They had hoped (in their letter) that the Bransoms would drop in on them any time they were driving out that way.

It was about three-thirty that afternoon when the Bransoms dropped in. The visit was wholly unexpected, but it seemed to Mom and Dad that it couldn't have come at a better time. Dad never wrote on Sunday. He took that day off to let his mind fill up again. He put on old clothes, usually, and worked in the garden. If Mom didn't wish him to go to church with her he spent a whole morning of freedom in the yard, then bathed and got into fresh but most comfortable clothes — khaki shirt and corduroys — and spurned his razor. It made him feel more like a free soul not to have to shave that day.

He and Mom were sitting on the porch when the Bransoms arrived, Mom reading aloud. Mom never looked slouchy in the matter of dress, and Dad thought he looked like a country gentleman very much at home. He was not quite bronzed by outdoor life, but certainly he was no pasty-faced office worker. And the place looked about as well as it could. The bougainvillea over the porch was a glory, and all Mom's flowers were doing very well. The house, compared to what the Bransoms were used to, was a mere shack, but it was both picturesque and comfortable. And with the children all away, it wasn't littered up as it usually was. Mom had set everything inside the house in order, while Dad had done the same outside. It was a simple spot, but it had a

million-dollar view. And at three-thirty it was delightful there on the porch. At about five it would suddenly get chilly, and they would have to go inside. But they had a fireplace, and Dad had sawed up a eucalyptus tree for exercise, so there would be no imitation about their fireplace.

Clara Bransom was very polite and only slightly supercilious. Bransom was more genuine in his appreciation. The four bicycles on the front porch appealed to him. The Bransoms had no children, and never would have any, and Bransom was getting old enough to wonder if he had not failed to do the thing he was created for. There was a hint of wistfulness in his voice as he said:

‘Where are the children? I’d like to see them.’

‘Oh, they’ll be along pretty soon,’ said Mom. ‘But they will have so much to say, and feel so boisterous, that conversation will become difficult after they arrive.’

Mom was all gaiety and graciousness — outside. Bransom didn’t look very healthy, and was yearning for what he couldn’t have. Mom felt she had given Dad a lot more than Clara had given Bransom. She believed Dad was realizing those truths — and what could make any woman happier than that?

At five o’clock Clara suggested that they should be going.

‘Oh, please don’t,’ urged Mom. ‘This is simply a wonderful treat for Gregory. And for me, too, of course. We get out so little that it is like having another world come to us. And the children will be home any moment now.’

Mom wanted to show her children. She also wished to give the Bransoms the idea that though the Sey-

mours lived very simply they lived both wisely and well. With that big leg of lamb in the icebox for the *pièce de résistance*, and the chocolate cake she had made for dessert for the midday meal, which had been postponed, she was far better provided than usual to entertain unexpected company. So her hospitality was warm and genuine.

The Bransoms wished to see the children, too. They cherished morbid curiosity concerning them. Clara secretly hoped they would be so unpleasant as to make Hervey glad he didn't have any, and Hervey secretly hoped they would give Clara a pang of remorse.

It was nearly six when the boys came trooping home. They needed no heralds. They could be heard before they got into the next block. They were calling and whistling to Brownie, who had been with them all day. Evidently they were straggling, Frank leading the van nearly a block ahead of Hank, the dawdler, but conversing by wireless telephone, or shouting. As they came nearer it seemed they were arguing about things they were bringing back.

'They always come with their pockets full of treasures,' chuckled Dad. 'They're always finding rocks they think have gold in them. There are a couple of mines back in the mountain, you know. And they bring in all kinds of odd plants. And sometimes they even bring water dogs.'

'Water dogs?' repeated Hervey.

'Yes. Little cousins to the frog. I don't know why they call them that.'

'How int'resting,' said Clara. Clara was very careful to pronounce 'int'resting' the clipped way.

Then the boys — and Brownie — burst in, and there was a moment of bedlam. They had worn their motliest clothes to go to the mountain, and scrambles through brush and tussles with one another had not improved them any.

Frank and Brownie came in first.

'Hey!' cried Frank, still using his outdoors voice, 'whose crate's that out in front?'

'That is Mr. Bransom's car, dear,' said Mom reprovingly. 'Speak to Mr. and Mrs. Bransom, darling. This is Frank.'

'Hi,' said Frank.

Clara smiled and nodded, but Hervey warmly thrust out a hand to Frank. Frank hadn't expected that.

'Shake hands with Mr. Bransom,' urged Dad.

Frank grinned and put his right hand in Mr. Bransom's. Mr. Bransom suddenly yelled and leaped out of his chair. Frank had left something squirming in his hand.

In his eagerness to get rid of it, Mr. Bransom flung it away from him, and it hit Clara, causing her to shriek.

'Aw, don't!' cried Frank, solicitously. 'It's nothin' but a water dog. It wouldn't hurt anybody.'

'Ugh!' said Clara, 'Anything in the reptile family gives me the horrors.'

'Me too,' said Hervey.

'Gee!' giggled Frank, delightedly, 'an' John's got a water snake!'

The other boys were on the porch. Mom and Dad arose as one body and barred their way into the living-room.

'Go around to the back porch and get rid of everything you have brought back,' ordered Mom sternly.

'Clean up there, and then come in the living-room on your best behavior. I want Mr. and Mrs. Bransom to see that you aren't savages.'

The boys disappeared, accompanied by Brownie.

Clara looked as tense as a racer waiting for the starter's gun, and ready to climb on her chair at half a second's notice. Mom smiled reassuringly.

'The children are so fond of pets,' she said, 'that they bring home all sorts of things. But they never bring any snakes where I am. Once one of them scared me so I was almost sick. They'll park all their living trophies outside.'

'They're real boys,' murmured Hervey uncomfortably.

'Yes,' agreed Clara. 'They must be a great comfort — if one likes menageries.'

She looked at Hervey as if to say, 'See what I saved you from.'

'Aren't you fond of animals?' asked Mom.

'No, indeed!' declared Clara. 'I have no use for cats, dogs, or anything like that. I think houses were made for people, not for animals.'

'Oh, you miss a lot,' said Dad. 'Why, without old Brownie we would feel a great sense of loss. Once when Sylvia was a baby she ran away, and he was the only one who saw her. He ran rings around her, barking to attract attention, until a neighbor halted the runaway. Some motorist, turning a corner, might not have seen the little girl, who was crawling half the time, but he couldn't have failed to see and hear Brownie. He's the most faithful, most intelligent old fellow imaginable.'

Clara nodded politely, but one could see she had her mental reservations.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘now that we’ve seen the children ——’

‘Oh, but you haven’t really seen them,’ said Dad. ‘As soon as Sylvia gets home and the boys clean up a bit we’ll have a bite of supper. And then you’ll see pretty good youngsters.’

It did not require pressing to get the Bransoms to stay for dinner. They probably wished to know how the other half lived.

When the boys came in Mom told them not to let old Brownie in, as the little living-room was getting crowded. The boys were washed and combed, and Dad felt very proud of them. But Mom noted with concern that two of them had their mouths full. They had come through the kitchen. Being boys, just in from a long tramp, they had decided the best way to prepare for dinner was by eating a little something.

‘I hope you boys haven’t got into my cake,’ she said.

‘Why,’ said John, innocently, ‘we thought that was our share, left from dinner.’ Sunday dinner at Weedlawn was usually the midday meal.

Mom’s heart sank. If the boys had taken only one piece each all would be well. But when they came in from a hike they were voracious.

Oh, well, with that leg of lamb she still had the important part of a Sunday evening cold supper. It was most reassuring to think of that leg of lamb. In her mind she could picture it, golden-brown, and savory, filling the icebox.

A car drove up outside. Betty and Sylvia could be heard calling good-byes, and Betty’s mother called, ‘Show your mother your new tricks, Sylvia.’ Then

the car drove away, and in a moment Sylvia came bursting into the room.

Now, Sylvia was not a boisterous child. She was a graceful and observant little miss. But she and Betty were in Madame de Beaulieu's dancing class for children. She could bend backward and walk across a room like a spider, with her head almost between her heels, or she could complete handspring after handspring, either backward or forward. None of the boys could do those things, so they had to respect Sylvia, even though she was the youngest.

Sylvia and Betty had been practicing a new trick. Sylvia had been expected home a good while before, and wished to show why she had been late. A surprising new trick, she thought, would explain all in one moment. So she did not wait to greet her family. With the same motion with which she opened the front door she went into a cartwheel which developed into a spider roll and ended with walking on hands.

She was walking on her hands, her little skirt reversed so that it hung down over her eyes, and her heels in the air, when she looked up into the face of Hervey Bransom. Then she realized it was not merely a family party and became embarrassed. She started to bound to her feet. But she had not seen Clara Bransom. Clara was in a chair which usually was back in a corner, but had been drawn forward that day. So instead of springing to her feet, Sylvia's feet landed on Clara's stomach just as Clara was trying to get out of the way, with the result that Sylvia was thrown back and struck her head.

It was one of those moments when Clara, had she been a real woman, would have been more concerned for the child than for herself. For she had been only

a little jolted, while Sylvia had tumbled hard. But Clara almost shrieked:

'Good heavens! Watch where you're going, child, or you'll kill somebody.'

Mom and Dad ran to Sylvia and picked her up. She was crying a little. The boys gathered about her and tried to make her laugh. Clara, who had risen from her chair but had sunk back into it as Sylvia's feet flew at her, was beginning to think she had been kicked back, and felt shamefully neglected.

When Sylvia began to laugh through her tears, Mom gave her a hug and cried, gaily:

'Oh, well, nobody's hurt. Now come and help Mother get some supper on the table.'

They went to the kitchen happily. But when she got into the kitchen Mom almost screamed. The icebox was wide open, and the leg of lamb on which she was counting was not there!

Her eyes swept the kitchen, hoping the boys had lifted it out to carve off a few pieces, but it was nowhere in sight.

Then her fearful eyes went back to the icebox, and she saw that the platter on which the leg had reposed was still there. In the hush of that awful moment, she heard a crunching sound in the back yard and she guessed the worst.

Brownie, the faithful Neardale, had followed the boys into the kitchen. After investigating the icebox, the boys had left it open, and then had drifted out of the room. Brownie had spent a long, active day on the trail. He had come just close enough to fifty rabbits to have his appetite whetted. When the boys had left the kitchen, a heavenly odor had come

to his nostrils. He had followed his nose until his dream came true.

Mom gasped and sank into a chair. Sylvia ran to the kitchen door, took in the situation, and then, with childish eagerness to bear news good or bad, dashed into the living-room.

'No dinner tonight,' she announced importantly. 'The boys got all the cake, and Brownie's got the leg of lamb.'

Clara arose and looked at Hervey triumphantly.

'We really *must* be going,' she said. 'I had forgotten that we have some friends coming in this evening, and really must hurry.'

Then, in what she intended for an undertone to Hervey, she ejaculated:

'What a household!'

But she put too much feeling in the whisper, and it carried to Dad. He was just about to protest that they could open a can of sardines and call it a picnic, but that whisper made him laugh.

'Maybe you'd better,' he agreed heartily.

6—THE APRICOT WAR

SPRING had come, and the Seymour children felt a stirring in their blood. Those who say that Southern California misses the changes of the seasons do not know her well. The first rains of autumn bring a sort of preview of spring. Then the brown fields and hills turn green again, and the landscape is gay with birds from more northerly climes which have flown south for the winter. In the mountains, the little streams which had almost given up grow bold and dashing again, even though they will sink into oblivion as soon as they get down into the sandy valleys. But golden leaves rain down from sycamores and mountain maples, just as they would in New England. The devil grass gets dormant, to the delight of all boys who have lawns to mow, and needs neither watering nor cutting. Like conservatives who refuse to change with a changed world, the devil grass and the deciduous trees refuse to respond to the winter rains until March. Then, refreshed by their rest, they burst out again in green glory, and Milky Ways of wildflowers spring up under the trees, and the birds seem to have adopted the Hollywood plan of nesting twice a year.

Hope springs eternal in the human breast, and in the Scottish breast it is basically a hope of financial

independence. Gregory Seymour was always trying to save some money. He had never saved any yet, but the habit was instinctive. His hope was ever-green, but never ripened.

One day in May Dad came home from the post-office with such a cheerful look that Mom thought he must have sold a novelette. But it was all because he thought the family could save a dollar or two.

'I met Mr. Rutledge at the post-office,' he announced, 'and he says his apricot trees are simply breaking down under fruit. He says if the boys will pick them tomorrow they can bring home all they can carry. Of course, the right thing for them to do will be to pick a bushel for him and a bushel for us, a bushel for him and a bushel for us. My dear, you can put up apricots and jam for all winter.'

'H'm!' said Mom. 'Putting up fruit isn't exactly a picnic.'

'And we want to go fishin' tomorrow,' said Chuck.

Dad looked hurt. After he had arranged everything — got jobs for everybody except himself — those who merely had to do the work were sadly unappreciative.

'I've already told Mr. Rutledge the boys will be there in the morning,' he said with dignity. 'I feel this is really too good an opportunity to miss. If I work hard all day, year in and year out, to make a living, you boys should be glad to work a few hours at such a pleasant job as picking apricots. Why, if Mr. Rutledge were trying to keep you out of his place you'd probably be scheming to get in there. Just imagine you're creeping in under the cover of darkness, when you can't tell a ripe apricot from a green one, and you'll get a thrill out of it.'

Next morning the boys reluctantly left for the Rutledge place just after breakfast, each of them carrying a gunnysack.

'It should be easy for each of you to pick a gunnysack full by noon,' said Dad generously. 'Then you may quit and have all the rest of the day for yourselves.'

Even that did not make the boys hurry. They progressed as if they grudged every step they took.

Dad went to his work, though, without noticing that, and Mom set to work to prepare for preserving. From the cellar she got several dozen jars, bottles, and containers of various kinds, and scrubbed and sterilized them. Before finishing that task, she had estimated how much sugar, paraffin, and rubber jar-caps she would need, and phoned for those things.

It was eleven-thirty when she finished her preparations, and then she hurriedly prepared luncheon. She hoped the boys would be home promptly at twelve.

But noon brought no sign of the boys. At twelve-thirty Mom called Dad and Sylvia to luncheon.

At one o'clock Mom phoned for another twenty pounds of sugar and another dozen fruit jars. The boys must be picking an enormous quantity of apricots, to be gone so long.

Dad had to go to the city on business just after luncheon, and wouldn't be back until six.

'Well,' he said cheerily, as he left, 'I hope to see a whole treasury of golden fruit when I get back. It should be a great help to your budget next winter, my dear. Just think what sixty or eighty quarts of canned apricots will mean when fruit is high.'

'I hope it will mean plenty,' said Mom, 'for it certainly is hard on the budget to buy all this extra sugar and these other supplies just now.'

By two o'clock Mom was worried. The boys should have been home long before that — and the handling of bushels of apricots in what was left of the afternoon and evening would be quite a job. She took a resolve that, however late she had to stay up that night, she wasn't going to be putting up fruit on Sunday.

At two-thirty Frank came home.

'I ain't feelin' so good,' he said, briefly.

Mom took one look at him and believed him. He looked as if he had eaten so many green apricots the color was showing through his cheeks.

'But where are your apricots?' she asked.

'I didn't bring 'em. I — I just got to feelin' bad all of a sudden.'

Mom could believe that, too. She began to get a clear vision of her sons, perched in the apricot trees, eating away like those birds which are said to devour twice their weight daily. For at least six hours they had been in the apricot grove, and probably instead of taking a bite now and then between pickings for the bag, they had picked for the bag now and then between bites.

'Did you eat green ones?' she demanded.

'Oh, not many,' said Frank reassuringly. 'Mostly we ate the mushy ones. But of course we ate a few of all kinds, just to see the difference.'

Mom hurried to the telephone and called Skipper-son's Pharmacy.

'Please send me some castor oil,' she said.

'Small bottle?' asked Lester Skipperson.

Mom did some desperate figuring. Probably Frank's condition was only a sample of that of all the boys.

'Oh, dear, no,' she sighed. 'I think you'd better send up a gallon.'

In the meantime, the other three boys were coming home by easy stages, stopping here and there for light refreshments, consisting of apricots. They had to stop, because the bags they had partly filled were heavy. But they were eating from force of habit rather than from any continuing desire for apricots. They had spent the day forming the habit, and it had become automatic. Boys working in the open air can't help getting hungry for something. The fruit was so delicious that for a while they ate more than they picked. After that they only ate those apricots which seemed especially luscious. When midday came they had lost all actual craving for apricots, but they realized that they had had no luncheon, and felt that they owed it to themselves to eat a little something to take its place. And when, later on, they felt pangs they naturally assumed they were pangs of hunger, and did their best to appease them with what was at hand.

When it was time to start home they found they had picked twice as many apricots as they could carry, and were utterly disgusted.

'Let's go down through the swell part of town,' suggested Hank, 'and sell some of 'em. Maybe we can get enough for a hamburger apiece, or a giant malt.'

The thought cheered them. They poured out part of the contents of each bag, and then started away with all they could carry over their shoulders.

But in Ourville nearly all the people own their homes and have their own fruit trees surrounding them. At that season nearly everybody either had apricots on his own trees or had a neighbor like Mr. Rutledge.

Discouraged but dogged, the boys straggled on. They were tired, and all of them were experiencing those internal rumbles which precede a storm. They were getting cross with one another and with the world in general.

John was leading the way, with Chuck following nearly half a block behind, and Hank out of sight around a corner, when they came to a vacant lot on which Edward Willis, Slick Gilkey, and Snoopy Alkus were playing marbles.

All three of these young gentlemen stared curiously at the gunnysacks over John's and Chuck's shoulders.

'Gone into the rag-picking business?' asked Edward sweetly.

John's retort was typical and boyish. Frequent pickings up and settings down of the load he was carrying had crushed a good many of the softer apricots. He had just fished out a handful of those, and he let them fly at Edward.

The attack was wholly unexpected. Slick was bigger than Hank, who still was out of sight, and Edward was two years older than John. He was about the same age as Chuck, but Chuck was smaller. Snoopy was smaller than John, but tough. Indeed, Slick and Snoopy were two of the toughest kids in town, and it was only because his mother was away from home that Edward dared to play with them. He had insulted John in the carefree spirit of one who knew he was perfectly safe, and the next instant something hit him in one eye, blinding him for the moment. Something soft and garbagey was squashed across the breast of his pretty new suit, and two or three other things had hit him.

It was mystifying. It daunted Slick and Snoopy as

well as Edward. It made them suspicious. Maybe John was only a decoy. Chuck, inspired by natural antipathy for Edward, was hurrying to John's side, and Hank was appearing around the corner. Who knew what other reinforcements might be in call?

Edward looked to Slick for leadership. Why didn't Slick do something? Slick was bigger than any of them and could lick any of them. He did not say those words, but Slick knew just what he meant. He knew his position in society demanded that he do something.

'Huh!' said Slick, caustically. 'What are you guys pickin' on us for when you got all the ammunition? Give us some apricots, too, and we'll have a war with you — three against three.'

When the Seymour boys got home, Mom was upstairs with Frank. They got to do some cleaning up at the kitchen sink before they faced her. Their hair was a mess from apricots, and their clothes were sticky with juice and fragments. But when they had set out that morning their tanned and glowing faces had suggested ripe apricots, and now, like Frank's, they suggested unripe ones. There was droopiness in their movements and dullness in their eyes. Only Hank had the heart to investigate the icebox, and he did it in a half-hearted way, as if more from a sense of duty than because of any real desire for food.

John was the first to climb upstairs, and at sight of him Mom realized that Frank had only been a herald, foretelling things to come.

And while John was getting his castor oil Chuck dragged himself upstairs and moaned:

'You better give me some, too.'

It was the first time any one of the boys had ever asked for it.

Hank alone seemed to be all right. He had gone out in the yard, and they could hear him whistling and playing his harmonica most cheerily. But it was only because fate was accumulating trouble for him. When Hank suddenly grew ill, at about half-past five, he was so ill that Mom thought it best to call the doctor.

When Dad got home at six o'clock he found a hospital. Four boys were in bed, and Mom was dashing from one to the other. She couldn't ignore their demands as hospital nurses can ignore bells when they don't wish to hear them. When her young cried out in pain Mom's feet sprouted invisible wings.

'Oh, I'm so glad you've come!' cried Mom. 'I've been awfully worried. I never saw a child as ill as Hank is.'

'Oh, he'll be all right,' said Doctor Jasper soothingly. 'He had me worried for a few minutes, too. But it's just apricots.'

'My word!' exclaimed Dad. 'You boys must have eaten more than you picked for the bag.'

Hank looked deeply hurt, cruelly misjudged.

'Ugh!' he groaned. 'No, Dad, we didn't eat so many... Ugh!... I don't think we ate more'n half as many as we picked.'

'What restraint!' murmured Dad. 'And about how many did you pick for the bag?'

''Bout half a gunnysack apiece.'

Dad did some mental estimating. Among them, the boys must have brought home more than one hundred pounds of fruit.

'How long did you stay at Mr. Rutledge's?' he asked,

still trying to get something definite on which to base his estimates.

'Aw, six or seven hours.'

'And did you keep eating apricots all the time?'

'Oh, no! After the first half hour we only ate the dead ripe ones that would 'a' mashed in the bag... But I guess there must 'a' been a lot of 'em.'

Yes, there must have been. Dad recalled that that was the reason why Rutledge had been so eager to have them picked. He couldn't bear seeing the crop of several trees go to waste, yet it wouldn't pay him to hire pickers and try to market it because the grove was so small and the apricots were so ripe. Rutledge had only half a dozen apricot trees in a grove including orange, lemon, grapefruit, fig, avocado, loquat, Japanese persimmon, and a few other trees — just a family orchard in a village in which there were a few fruit trees in nearly every yard.

But still Doctor Jasper grinned.

'He'll be all right,' he said. 'His face is beginning to look human already. He probably mixed in thirty or forty greenish ones with a few hundred very ripe ones. But he'll be eating you out of house and home tomorrow.'

With comforting confidence, the doctor went away briskly. Mom continued to sit beside Hank's bed, holding his hand and putting packs on his brow at intervals, while Dad went around and visited the other invalids.

But in half an hour all was peaceful, and the strain and worry had faded from Mom's face. Hank had sunk into a gentle sleep, and all the others had been resting easily for an hour. And then Mom suddenly looked stricken.

'I haven't even thought about supper!' she cried. 'Since two-thirty, when Frank got home, I've thought of nothing but these boys.'

'Honey,' said Dad, 'you don't need to worry about supper. The boys certainly don't need any. What will make a finer supper for you and Sylvia and me than bread and butter and milk and all the fresh-picked apricots we can eat?'

They went down to the kitchen. There on the table were rows and rows of jars which Mom had scrubbed and sterilized, intending to fill them with apricots. There were bags of sugar, big kettles, paraffin, and everything else there was in the house which might be useful at preserving time. But they saw no apricots.

Search in the yard revealed the gunnysacks. But there were only a few mashed and bruised apricots in each of them, though one end of each sack was soaked with juice.

Upstairs they went. Chuck and John were sitting up in bed, looking bright.

'When do we eat, Mom?' they demanded.

'What did you do with the apricots you brought home?' demanded Mom.

The boys looked at one another.

'Oh,' said John, 'I guess we used most of 'em up in the war.'

'What war?'

'We met Eddie Willis and Slick Gilkey and Snoopy Alkus on the way home, an' they challenged us to an apricot war. An', gee! Dad, it was a swell war. When we got enough apricots out of the sacks so's we could swing 'em we used 'em to sandbag with!'

7—THE SQUEAKY CAR MYSTERY

IF IT weren't for visiting relatives from the East, those who live in California never would know what a wonderful State they have. But because of visitors, they have become the world's greatest travelers. A Los Angeles family would contentedly spend the week-end at home if it weren't for their desire to impress Cousin Kate from Iowa. For her sake they get out early on a Saturday and head for the beach. But they merely give her a glimpse of the first beach — they head south along the Coast Highway for San Diego, edging the ocean all the way. After luncheon in San Diego they are off for Mexico. After spending a night at Agua Caliente or Ensenada, where marvelously costumed Spanish singers and dancers (from Los Angeles) entertain them, they start early again for the United States, spin along old stage-coach routes through Julian, region of gold and blood in gold-rush days, and San Jacinto, where Helen Hunt Jackson got the story she wove into 'Ramona.' After a look at the Saboba Indian reservation they can climb Mount San Jacinto, where they can find snow half of the year when they get up above ten thousand feet, and from which they can look down, as from an airplane, on Palm Springs and the desert. With binoculars, it is quite possible for Cousin Kate to stand in snow and see bathers in the outdoor plunge in the patio of a

desert hotel, or girls in shorts riding bicycles about the desert, so that they can sun-bathe while they exercise. Indeed, if Cousin Kate knew just where to look down there, she might see Doctor Einstein sun-bathing in his favorite winter haunt, the Samuel Untermyer place.

Then they can take Cousin Kate home by way of Riverside, with a stop at the Mission Inn. And if that trip hasn't made her marvel at Southern California's infinite variety they can dare her to 'fly across the ocean' by taking the airplane trip to Catalina.

Of course, the two-day trip will have covered close to five hundred miles. But after one has lived in Southern California a few years he gets so used to showing visitors about that two hundred miles of traveling a day is not considered worth mentioning. Visiting a place only a hundred miles away is merely taking the air. To consider it a trip, one must go as far as Mazatlan, or Vancouver or Honolulu.

Being car-less in Southern California almost distinguishes one. People will say: 'No car? Why, how strange!' And unless you have a good reason you are set down as either miserly or eccentric. For there are more than four hundred and fifty square miles within the corporate limits of Los Angeles, and most of the Southern California cities, towns, and hamlets are spread out like that. Many a man who lives and works in Los Angeles has to drive thirty miles to cover the most direct route from his home to his office. Or a man who works in Pasadena may prefer to live in Glendora, driving through Monrovia, Arcadia, and Sierra Madre to get there, and continually meeting on the road men who live in Pasadena but work in Glendora. If one employs a washwoman,

a charwoman, a gardener, or a stable groom, the employee usually reports for duty in some kind of motor car. Fully a quarter-million people in Los Angeles county who cannot afford garages possess motor vehicles, letting them stand outdoors when not in use. Even the boy who shines your shoes may have to excuse himself suddenly because his car is parked in a one-hour zone, and he sees a cop coming. He can run it around the block, park it in a different place, and be safe for another hour.

But the Seymours were different. They had never been to Big Bear or Lake Arrowhead, to Big Falls or San Jacinto, to Catalina or Santa Barbara or Caliente or any of the other places week-end trippers continually sought. The boys had become able hitch-hikers and had visited the city and all the near-by beaches, and the whole family had been up to Mount Lowe, because they could go there by street-car, but all the other resorts were mere names to them. So there was excitement in the household when they received word from Uncle Stuart that he was driving out in his brand-new, next-year model motor car, and wished them to show him everything of interest.

The children had never seen Uncle Stuart, and therefore he was a figure of romance, from ten to one hundred times as handsome, rich, and talented as he actually was. For it is only human to speak expansively of those members of our families who are not on hand to disprove our statements. Even if we don't amount to much ourselves, we like to be related to someone who does, and it is easy to build up the legendary importance of one who is far away. Uncle Stuart was undoubtedly much more prosperous than

Greg was, for he had gone into business instead of literature. Without being asked or anything, he had realized, after Sylvia was born, that their house must be getting too small for them, and had sent Dad enough money to enlarge it. And when he had seen a picture of the children later he had decided all of them were big enough to have bicycles and velocipedes, and one day a truck had come all the way out from Los Angeles to deliver an order relayed from Chicago, a whole cargo of beautiful new bikes, velocipedes — and boxing gloves.

It is possible that, at first blush, the children were a little disappointed in Uncle Stuart. Instead of being seven feet tall he was a little shorter than Dad, and a little rounder, too. When the car drove up to the house and they all rushed out to surround it he merely sat in the front seat and blinked at them a moment, then opened the door slowly, waving the eager children away.

‘Greg,’ he said, ‘I’m sick. Crossin’ that darned desert. Change of temperatures. Don’t want to bother you. Where’s a hospital?’

Alas! Uncle Stuart was only human, a mere vulnerable creature.

But Mom and Dad made him come in. Mom diagnosed his trouble as flu.

‘You get to bed,’ she ordered, ‘and as soon as you’re there I’ll give you a treatment we learned in France.’

Uncle Stuart was feeling so miserable he made no protest. He had got up early that morning, after a bad night at Las Vegas, and had driven more than ten hours, feeling worse every minute. A car like his could have made the trip in six hours.

They helped him out of the car and, one on each

side, supported him as he staggered into the house. They had just got him to a couch inside when Dad suddenly raised his head like a listening deer, and flashed a startled look at Mom. Outside they heard the car engine suddenly starting up.

'I'll take care of Stuart,' said Mom. 'You save the car — and the children.'

Dad let go of Uncle Stuart and rushed out. The children had lost no time. They were trying to find out everything about that car which an x-ray could tell them. Chuck had the hood up and was studying the engine, utterly fascinated. Hank was in the driver's seat, making the motor whirr. John was in the rear seat, trying to see what was underneath the cushions, and Frank was behind, opening the trunk.

'Get out of that car,' ordered Dad, in a low but terrible voice, 'or I'll thrash every one of you half to death.'

They got out in a hurry.

'Now stay out,' commanded Dad, and hurried back into the house to aid with the patient.

Uncle Stuart's affliction was a cold of flu proportions. His bones ached, his body burned, his eyes wept, and his head was splitting. Dad helped him to bed, and then Mom brought the remedy they had learned in France, which was a full pint of mulled wine. It was steaming hot, and made hotter with dashes of spices. It was so hot Uncle Stuart could only sip it, but he was ordered to down it as quickly as he could, and then snuggle under the covers, keeping them close around his neck, while Mom threw on an extra blanket.

In twenty minutes, sweat was pouring from the patient, and the fever was vanishing.

'You'll keep on sweating like that for about six hours,' said Dad, 'and you'll have to be as careful as the dickens not to catch cold again. Keep the covers snug about your shoulders all the time, and never kick out a foot just because you're too warm. Here are high-necked slippers and a bathrobe as warm as a buffalo robe. When you get out of bed don't lose an instant in getting into them. If you're careful, you'll have nothing but a few remnants of your cold tomorrow. . . . Now I'll go out and take care of your car.'

When he got outside the boys were just edging into the car again. They didn't wish to be disobedient, but the attraction of a brand-new, next-year model car was irresistible. They weren't in the car, but their heads were. The doors had been left open, the cushions standing on their sides, and the hood up.

Dad's manner was brisk and peremptory. He lowered the hood and clamped it tightly. He slammed down the cushions and slammed the doors. Then, from the trunk behind, he got the tarpaulin car cover, as they had no garage, stretched it over the car, tied it so tightly that no one could open doors or anything, and gave orders that no one should touch it.

Even then the four boys sat wistfully looking at the canvas cover, as if trying to see through it. They could not think of anything else. Only Sylvia found other things worth thinking about. Sylvia wasn't worried about the car at all. She was worried because she couldn't find her cat, Patricia, on whose neck she had recently tied a big pink ribbon. Sylvia knew mother would be wanting that ribbon pretty soon, and might be annoyed if she couldn't find it. So she paid no attention to the car, but kept going about, calling for Patricia.

Mulled wine and care worked wonders. Uncle Stuart spent the first evening of his visit in bed, and all the next day was classed as a convalescent and kept there, though as the hours dragged on he snorted that he was perfectly well. But the third day nothing could hold him down. He was up early and got outdoors before anyone could say he couldn't. It was a beautiful day, and it seemed as if being out in it would be good medicine.

'Right after breakfast,' announced Uncle Stuart, 'we'll all pile in the car and drive up to Lake Arrowhead. We can all get in the car. A bit crowded, maybe, but the trip won't take long in that car. Say, I can make ninety in that baby and hardly know it is going fast!'

'Goodness!' exclaimed Mom, 'I hope you won't go over forty with my flock in the car. You know, we have a terrible lot of accidents out here.'

'Aw, Mom!' chorused the boys disgustedly. To them the mere suggestion that anyone drive a car at less than half the speed of which it was capable seemed wicked.

'You never need to worry when driving with me,' said Uncle Stuart reassuringly but noncommittally. 'I never had an accident yet — except two or three times when it was the other fellow's fault.'

That did not reassure Mom. She had never heard of an accident which wasn't the other fellow's fault.

The car was so roomy that they weren't at all crowded. Uncle Stuart drove, with Frank and Hank in the front seat with him. Chuck and John sat on the folding seats and Mom, Dad, and Sylvia in the rear seat. The boys had engineered the seating so as to get Mom as far as possible from the speedometer.

But Mom, as usual, saw what they were up to and became wary and watchful. Before the car had gone a mile she said:

‘Stuart, I hear some kind of odd squeak.’

In this age you can make jokes about husbandly or wifely loyalty or even the chastity of daughters, but if you cast reflections on the performance of a man’s newest and best-beloved car he is more than a gentleman if he does not snort at you. Uncle Stuart managed not to snort, but he just barely managed it.

‘Don’t worry,’ he said. ‘This car came clear across the mountains and the desert without once having to be tuned up. It’s as right as human ingenuity can make it.’

‘For all that,’ persisted Mom, ‘I hear a strange squeak, one that doesn’t sound right at all.’

Uncle Stuart slowed up.

‘I don’t hear anything,’ he said accusingly.

‘Well, no,’ confessed Mom, ‘I don’t either now. But I certainly did hear it while you were going so fast.’

Uncle Stuart laughed.

‘I didn’t know you were one of those nervous women,’ he chortled. ‘Just lean back and relax, my dear. This is supposed to be a pleasure trip, not a worry contest.’

Dad smiled to soften the reproof, but shook his head at Mom.

‘We’re just about as safe in this car as we can be,’ he reminded her.

Mom did lean back and relax — resolutely. Soon Uncle Stuart began feeling unrestrained, and let the speedometer creep up to sixty.

Hank looked at the speedometer disgustedly.

'Is this all this crate'll do, Uncle Stew?' he asked, in a tone too low to be heard in the rear seat.

Uncle Stew's reply was not articulate. It was a grunt which might mean anything and certainly meant something vehement. So gradually that it was hardly noticeable, he let the speedometer get up to sixty-five. In a car like that one was hardly sensible of speed until he looked out the window. Then one noticed that other cars were being zipped past, and that scenery was streaming to the rear so rapidly that one could hardly distinguish its features.

Hank was starry-eyed, and in silent collusion with Uncle Stew. He would point out a car on the far horizon ahead of them, and in five minutes they would be zipping past it. It seemed that nothing else on the road could rival Uncle Stew's car and Uncle Stew's driving.

For a time Mom's attention was diverted by Dad's conversation. Dad couldn't talk long, though. He could relate an incident with gusto, and could out-talk everybody else while he had something to relate, but he couldn't keep up any sort of conversation when he ran out of things to tell. The harder he tried to think of something to say at such times, the more desultory and sparse his conversation became.

So Mom began noticing the speed with which the countryside went past, and again became conscious of the squeaks. Stuart didn't like to have any mention made of squeaks, but she had all her children with her. What if something in the car were grinding away to the breaking point? If she didn't speak up, a terrible accident might be just ahead.

'Stuart,' she called, 'I don't want to be fussy and nervous, but there certainly is a most persistent squeak in this car, and it doesn't sound right at all.'

Again Uncle Stew slowed down, disgustedly.

'I can't hear a thing that seems wrong,' he said, after listening intently.

'No,' confessed Mom. 'I can't either, now. It's an odd, intermittent squeak. It sounds as if something is working loose.'

Just ahead was a service station.

'We'll go in here and settle this, once and for all,' said Uncle Stew, with determination.

They climbed out of the car at the service station and turned it over to two mechanics. While the passengers got out to stretch, the mechanics, in consultation with Uncle Stew, examined all the operating mechanism of the car, and could find nothing which wasn't functioning perfectly. Uncle Stew felt so vindicated that he tipped them a dollar each.

'Now,' he said, cheerily, as they drove on toward Lake Arrowhead, 'we know positively that nothing is wrong, and can make up for the time we have lost.'

The highway was broad and smooth. Soon the car was mowing down scenery so that it seemed to fall in windrows behind them.

Mom wasn't hearing any squeaks and tried her best not to notice the speed. But Dad had grown utterly conversationless, and she couldn't help noticing it. And once she noticed it, it became terrifying.

She bit her lip. Stuart had been driving for years without ever hurting anyone or getting hurt. Still, at such a speed, it would be hard to escape if someone else endangered them. She leaned forward to peer between John and Chuck at the speedometer. But just then Hank moved so that she couldn't see it.

'We're going dreadfully fast,' she whispered to Dad.

'Hey?' said Dad. Ever since they had started, Dad had seemed a little deaf in one ear. Or maybe he didn't wish to hear.

Mom endured for another five minutes. Then she leaned close to Dad and whispered:

'Listen.'

'Hey? What did you say?'

'I said, listen.'

'Sorry, honey, I didn't catch what you said.'

'Listen. Don't you hear a squeak now?'

'Hear what?'

'A strange squeak.'

'Oh, a squeak. Why, no, dear, I don't hear anything.'

Mom almost wrung her hands.

'It's just because of the hard wax in your ears,' she declared. 'I'm afraid something dreadful is just about to happen.'

She leaned forward and got a good look at the speedometer. She gasped. It was registering seventy-four.

Then her acute and worried ears heard such a series of squeaks as she had not heard before.

'Stuart,' she cried, 'slow down. This car is just about to fall to pieces!'

Uncle Stew groaned aloud, but she was so clearly in earnest that he slowed the car immediately.

'Listen to that!' cried Mom. 'You can just hear something coming to pieces. I never heard such squeaks in a car in my life.'

Uncle Stew drew to the side of the road, and everyone listened intently.

'I believe I do hear a little squeak,' said Dad.

'Yes,' cried Sylvia, who had slipped to the floor and had her ear to the cushion, 'I hear it, too. And it's right under here.'

'Nonsense!' snorted Uncle Stew. 'It couldn't be. There's no operating mechanism under there. However, we'll try again to satisfy you timid souls.'

The car had been moving along very slowly for a minute, but he stopped it dead still.

'Everybody get out,' he ordered.

They got out, Mom leading the retreat. Only Sylvia remained in the car, and Mom ran back to snatch her out of it.

'Why, even with the car stopped I can hear it!' she exclaimed. 'Hurry, Sylvia, something is about to explode.'

She swung Sylvia out of the car. Uncle Stuart scowled as men often do, not at Mom but because of her.

'I'll show you there's nothing the matter,' he snapped.

'Oh, do be careful, Stuart,' Mom urged anxiously.

But Uncle Stuart was determined. He would stand or fall, live or die, by his car. He flung himself into the rear of it and tore the cushions out of it.

Then suddenly his whole manner changed. He swayed backward.

'Well, I'll be . . . Ouch!' he ejaculated.

He dodged, as a gray streak clawed its way over his shoulder.

'Patricia!' cried Sylvia, joyously. 'Patricia isn't lost, after all!'

Dad looked bewildered. Mom staggered with sudden laughter.

'Patricia disappeared just about the time you ar-

rived, Stuart,' she explained. 'Sylvia has been heart-broken. The poor cat must have been trapped in your car when Greg chased the boys out of it and slammed down the cushions.... No wonder she squeaked.'

'Well,' cried Dad, 'we know now it was only a cat. That's a relief.'

'But it wasn't only a cat,' announced Stuart solemnly.

'Oh!' exclaimed Mom. 'There was really something wrong then? I'm so glad I was a 'fraidy cat.'

'Not exactly something wrong,' said Stuart. 'But I guess Patricia had good reason to be looking for a hiding-place. Here are the main causes of those squeaks, my dear.'

And Stuart held up four kittens.

8—THE SEYMOURS GET IN THE SWIM

IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA private swimming pools are in the same class as motor cars, inasmuch as they are the prized possessions of most of the people who can afford them and many people who can't. The motion-picture people started the fad, and it grew until most of the actors, directors, and writers getting a thousand dollars a week or more felt that they *should* have pools in their yards, while those getting less than that but trying to be classed with those who got more felt that they *had* to have them.

Mrs. Morgan Waltham Willis had spent years of her life thinking of bathing suits as highly improper, but when pools became a mark of social distinction she felt that she must have one, for Edward's sake. Then somebody told her that Lawrence Tibbett retained his figure by swimming three or four times a day. After that Mrs. Willis's favorite afternoon wear was a bathing suit. She built an outdoor fireplace and camp stove beside the pool, so that one could grill steaks and make coffee there, and in hot weather frequently invited all the best people of Ourville there for a swimming party, followed by supper in the patio.

The fact that the ocean was within easy driving distance only made the pool seem more desirable be-

cause more of a luxury. Mrs. Willis pointed out that anybody could use the ocean.

The Seymours were never invited to Mrs. Willis's parties. And the Seymour children were never invited to the far more numerous parties given by Edward Willis. When the weather got really warm, Edward's friends gathered at the pool daily, during the hours when Mrs. Willis had no need of the pool for her own friends, and during summer vacation Edward's popularity grew amazingly.

Though the Seymour family tree was a typical American family tree, in that there was a great deal of shade between the root and the branches, Gregory cherished an innate conviction that the Seymours were not only just as good as anybody else but a little bit better, and any social discrimination against his children made his wrath smolder. And he knew that no other social distinctions are as merciless as those of children. Men and women who have proved that they have something of value in themselves can gain comfort and confidence from it and, if they are not still childish, can be amused and disdainful of snobbery. But when all the best-dressed children of a community are trooping to a certain place, the few who are not invited are utterly and pointedly outcast. Nothing else would have bored the elder Seymours as would a visit to the Willis home, and if begged to go there they would have sought for excuses, but what looked as if it might grow into a community line of caste, over which their children could not step, made them don the superbland smile which is the outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual writhing.

'You know,' said Dad, 'it wouldn't be so hard for us to build a swimming pool.'

Mom looked up in some dismay. Dad was Scotch, but when he plunged he plunged.

'I thought they were rich men's toys,' she said.

'So is that sweater you are knitting,' said Dad. 'In a big store it would cost you forty dollars, but by making it yourself you get it for very little, counting the labor as pastime. All four of our boys are big enough to do a lot of work. I was over at Oscar Rasbach's yesterday, and you ought to see the things he has done with concrete. He has built an outdoor fireplace which is a five-hundred-dollar asset to his home, and I'll bet it didn't cost him forty. It's absolutely handsome, and a place of real entertainment. From there I went over to Professor Seiling's, and he's done even better. You should see the fountain Seiling has built, and also the swimming pool, and a lot of other things. If a pianist-composer and a violinist can do things like that with their valuable hands, why can't I?'

'Well,' said Mom, dubiously, 'there's a lot in knowing how. And I've heard that nearly all musicians have a sort of second gift for engineering.'

'And you naturally don't think your husband capable of learning what they learned?'

'Oh, I don't mean that, dear. But it may take quite a little practice.'

The children, however, were not dubious at all. They had all looked up with great interest. So Dad blandly waved aside Mom's doubts.

'The biggest part of the job for most people,' he said, 'is the excavating. Seiling had to hire a man several days to do the excavating for his pool. But nature has done it for us. The slope of our own lot is just the slope we need for a pool shallow at one

end and deep at the other. All we have to do is build walls and let the water flow in from the canyon over which our house hangs.'

'Gee!' exclaimed Hank, 'we could build a bigger'n better pool than the Willises got.'

'But wouldn't it take about fifty dollars' worth of water to fill a pool like that?' asked Mom. 'And wouldn't it have to be filled at least twice a month?'

'We wouldn't have to change the water more than once a month,' said Dad, 'for only a few people would use it. Besides, they have chemicals to put in the water. Then we have another advantage. The town of Ourville is above us. The lowest corner of the town sags into the canyon which passes our house. Once a month the superintendent of the water plant drains all the pipes by the simple expedient of opening a hydrant at the lowest point and letting the water rush down our canyon. He does that to keep any stagnant water from remaining in the pipes, so it is imperative that he do it at least once a month. That is why once a month a torrent rushes down this canyon of ours which otherwise is utterly dry, except when it rains. That torrent misses us by only about a hundred feet. I believe that by placing an intake pipe in that torrent we can change the water in our pool once a month at no cost whatever.'

Many a woman buys what she shouldn't just because it is a bargain. Many a man spends money he cannot afford to spend merely because someone has given him a pass on a boat or train or even to a show. Cement, rock, and sand for such a pool would cost more than the Seymours could afford just then, but the fact that they could have a pool so much cheaper than could anyone else made them feel it was almost a

duty to have it, especially after Dad decided that they could build it themselves. Dad had intended to say that as soon as he sold a novel they would build a swimming pool, but he thought of the slightly disillusioned look which might flicker a moment in Mom's eyes if he did, and hurried on with a stirring word picture of what might be done. The children were so delighted with the idea that he was swept away by the enthusiasm he had inspired in them. He had never made any concrete, and neither had any of them, but they showed a confidence in him which was flattering. He felt sure he could do it, with their help.

As Dad never wrote on Sunday, no matter how poor they got, the day of rest was the day when he essayed important physical jobs about the house. He was so eager to get to that one, though, that he started at daybreak on Saturday, not even stopping to shave. All day Saturday he built forms for the concrete walls. The floor of the pool, he thought, could be laid without a form, even though it was much higher at one end than at the other. If the earth were smoothed and the concrete laid on it six inches thick, he believed, it could simply be evened with a trowel.

The boys, who always enjoyed nailing things, wished to help him build the forms, but he was afraid they didn't understand just how he wanted them. Besides, there was only one hammer, and he didn't like to borrow. So he told them to run along and play, for there would be plenty of work for them to do later.

He didn't have a concrete mixer.

'I suppose they built the pyramids without concrete mixers,' he said. 'Besides, I never used or investigated a concrete mixer, and might let a lot of concrete harden in it and cause trouble. We'll just make a big box and mix our concrete with a hoe.'

When he started doing that, bright and early Sunday morning, he realized that he had spoken truly when he told the boys there would be plenty of work for them to do. Mixing concrete with a hoe would be excellent training for prize fighters, and as a reducing exercise has few equals. When you push, every muscle from your toes to your bristling hair tightens into play. When you pull, every muscle reverses its action. In a very few minutes, if you are not trained to it, your arms begin to ache, and it is not long before your stomach muscles and leg muscles follow suit. And every time you think the concrete must be perfectly mixed by now your hoe turns up a big gob of perfectly dry sand. When you hoe corn there is resistance when the hoe strikes the earth, but when it is drawn back for another stroke there is an instant which is almost restful. When you hoe concrete a sticky, hard-packing mass obstructs every move of the hoe, forward or backward.

Ten minutes of that had sweat pouring from Dad's brow, and he was beginning to pant.

'Get another hoe,' he told Hank. 'And, Chuck, you get the rake. John, you get the shovel. It's going to take all of us to do this job, believe me.'

'It's gettin' awful stiff,' said Hank, after using a hoe a moment. 'Hadn't we better put in more water?'

They added water, and soon had to add water again. It was surprising how that mixture of sand and rock and cement took up water.

At last they were able to scoop it up in buckets and pour it out on what was to be the floor of the pool. They decided to begin at the bottom and work up, as the form for the deep end was at the bottom and would hold the concrete on one side.

Their muscles felt as if they had mixed enough concrete to pave a highway, but it spread out over less than four square yards when they poured it. Dad did some worried estimating.

'Ye gods!' he murmured. 'It's going to take fifty times that much for all the floor and walls! We've got to cut down the size of this pool right now.'

When Dad estimated he always had to run his fingers through his hair. He also stroked his chin. Those actions were so habitual that he performed them unconsciously, unmindful of the fact that sometimes his hands were white with powdery cement and at others there were a few grains of mortar on them. Dad was very heavily wooded, having a jungle of hair and a beard which became very noticeable if not shaved off every day. He had not shaved since early Friday morning. The sweat which poured from him as he mixed concrete made his face and hair moist, and a few million infinitesimal particles of powdery cement winged their way to the hairy refuges he offered as if they were homing pigeons.

Dad intended to do the whole job on Sunday. Sunday was the only day he could spare from his work. Already he had added Saturday, and he couldn't take more time. So he worked furiously, despite the weariness which unaccustomed toil always causes. Yet, though he started early, it was half-past ten before he had the first strip of concrete laid,

and it was only twelve feet long and not quite three feet wide.

While he laid that first strip, the boys were mixing more concrete. But they weren't heavy enough for the job. To make it mix easier they added more and more water. They finally got so much water that they didn't have to mix it. They could stir it. In fact, they could almost have gone swimming in it.

Down in the bottom of what was to be the pool, Dad didn't notice. So the boys decided to remedy the situation as best they could. They dumped another bag of cement into the concrete, and then another lot of sand and rock. But they didn't worry about proportions. All they wanted was results.

They got results, all right. When Dad came up for air they had a mixture as thick as putty.

'Good Lord!' cried Dad, at sight and feel of it. 'I ask you kids to help me and — oh, get out of here!'

They 'got' with alacrity. Great as their enthusiasm had been at the start of the job, it is not in boy nature to relish any hard job after several consecutive hours. Never was any other order of Dad's obeyed with such promptness. In a moment only Sylvia, who was sitting on the porch with Patricia in her lap, was in sight.

Then Dad realized he needed assistance.

'Turn on the hose,' he yelled, like a fire chief.

Sylvia put Patricia down and ran to the hose. Dad seized a hoe and began frantically working the water into the mixture. He feared he was too late — that it already had begun to harden — and he worked so hard that sweat poured from him. But he thought no more of sweat and weariness than would a man inspired by fear, running for his life. And so he tri-

umphed. In ten minutes he knew the mixture was saved. He had been working so desperately, though, that he had been heedless of time as well as of strain. To him it seemed only a minute since he had shouted to Sylvia to turn on the water.

'Turn off the hose now, Sylvia,' he shouted, but kept on with his work so earnestly that he did not turn his head. He did not notice that Sylvia had wandered away with Patricia in her arms.

The mixture suddenly was getting much too soft.

'Turn it off!' roared Dad.

At the other end of the mortar box, the hose had been thrust down to the very bottom of the box, in an effort to wet the substratum of the mixture first. That kept Dad from observing, at first, that the water was not turned off in obedience to his command. It was some minutes before he realized that water still was bubbling up from the bottom and the mixture was beginning to float.

He looked wildly about for Sylvia, but she was not in sight. He dashed to the other end of the box and flung out the hose. Then he ran to the faucet to turn it off. He had it all to do over again. It was nothing but soup, and he would have to work in cement and sand until it reached the right consistency, and the box he had made was so full he doubted that he could get in enough material without sloshing over much of its contents. It was very hard to mix such a quantity with a hoe.

He had no time to lose. He feared Mom would come out and catch him in that 'sea of troubles.' He poured in three bags of sand, then shoveled in some gravel and then poured in a bag of cement. The wind caught the powdery cement and blew it all over him.

Finally he thought the mixture was right, and began pouring it into the pool. Then he realized that the incline of the pool from the deep end to the shallow end presented a problem. His concrete showed a tendency to run.

It was twelve-thirty when Mom came out to ask when he would be ready for dinner. They usually ate Sunday dinner at one o'clock, but Mom knew that Dad didn't like to be stopped in the midst of any job like that. At sight of Dad she stopped.

'The great stone face!' she cried.

Dad straightened and gave her a perplexed look. He hadn't read 'The Great Stone Face' since he was a schoolboy, and could recall nothing from it which applied to him.

'Meaning what?' he demanded.

'You're going Galatea one better. You're turning into a statue.'

Still unenlightened, Dad tried to run his fingers through his hair. But he couldn't. His hair had turned to stone. Clouds of cement dust and perspiration had combined to give him a concrete permanent. His hair hadn't been able to wait for night, but had turned white in a single morning and stood up as if frozen. His face, too, had had beard enough to catch many particles of cement when he stroked his chin, and every time he had emptied a bag of cement some of it had settled in his eyebrows. Then, when he had come to the less strenuous work of laying and smoothing the concrete, his face and hair had dried.

Dad tried never to curse in the presence of women or children. But when he realized his plight two emphatic words burst from him as if fired from a gun.

'I'm sorry,' he apologized. But Mom was almost crying with laughter.

‘It’s a relief to hear you,’ she asserted. ‘I thought maybe you were turning into a plaster of Paris saint.’

It took most of the rest of the day to make Dad look human again, and he had to give up most of his hair to do it. Next day he hired two experienced men, who owned a concrete mixer, to finish the job.

‘If all the writers took to doing their own concrete work,’ he explained, ‘all the concrete workers might have to become writers, greatly increasing our competition. It’s best to give everybody a chance to earn a living in his own way.’

The pool cost a good deal more than Dad had imagined it would, but it established the Seymour children socially. Its setting was more natural. It was more like the old swimming hole than any other pool in town, and appealed more to the youthful imagination. Most cogent of all reasons, one could enjoy much more liberty in the Seymour pool than in the Willis pool. Around the residence of Mrs. Morgan Waltham Willis children were expected to tread lightly and speak softly. In the Seymour pool they could act like children, and whatever grownups they happened to see were likely to do the same. So, overnight, the expensive Willis pool became the well of loneliness.

9—YOU CAN'T OUTWIT THE FATES

BROWNIE, the faithful Neardale, had grown old and gray. He had been old enough for responsible moments when Chuck was born, and now Chuck was nearly thirteen. When Chuck was a baby in arms, Brownie had trotted along every time the Seymours went out, and while Mom and Dad were looking after two-year-old Hank, Brownie had watched Chuck. He seemed to look on it as his duty to guard babies, and by the time Sylvia was born the family called him Grandpa.

Indeed, not all grandparents are as self-forgetful in their devotion as he was.

'We should get a pup for old Brownie to train before he goes,' said Mom. 'Then the children won't miss him quite so much.'

So, as Chuck's thirteenth birthday was at hand, they went shopping for dogs and found Pete.

Pete was a mixture of Scottie and brindle bull, as small as any Scottie and as bowlegged as any bull. His ears were exclamation points and his quizzical eyes and pugnacious face somehow suggested a comic paper Irishman blackened by burnt cork. He walked with a swagger and conducted himself with great dignity on all occasions, except when he saw some dog twenty times his size approaching his domain. Then he became a Scottie rampant, standing on his

hind legs, pawing the air with his forefeet, and barking a warning in most serious and determined tones. A comical dwarf fiercely threatening a giant would look something as Pete did on such occasions. One couldn't look at him at any time without smiling, and the exaggerated dignity of his manner made one chuckle behind his hand. But when Pete grew ferocious nobody could help laughing aloud.

He was far too dignified to romp, as old Brownie would, and even submitted to petting with a bored look, as if he thought it was all rather silly but was too much of a gentleman to make a scene about it. Yet Chuck loved him, and so did all the family. He was so cute and yet so valorous. It seemed as if nature had tried to make up for giving him a caricature face and body by giving him the heart of a lion. You knew at a glance that Pete was sincere, that he would be faithful unto death, and that he asked no odds of life.

One of the exciting annual events at the Ourville school was the pet show. It was held the Saturday before the last day of school, and brought out such an array of pets as delighted the children and sometimes scared the teachers half to death. For not only were rabbits, birds, dogs, cats, and ponies included, but jumping frogs, toads, snakes, rats, mice, tree toads, and water dogs. John Seymour, for example, had such a fondness for living things that he could become just as devoted to a rat or a snake as he could to a pigeon. Once Miss Hawke seized John because she thought he was hiding something inside his shirt, and then shrieked and almost fainted as a dear little garter snake poked its head out into her hand.

The pet show would not have been an annual event if it had not been for the Kiwanis Club. The Kiwanis Club was an important organization in Ourville, and when it offered to sponsor a pet show and secure prizes the school board and the teachers expressed enthusiasm. The children unquestionably enjoyed it, so the president of the club declared it should be an annual event. After that, nobody could back down.

When the third annual pet show was announced, Chuck's eyes grew round.

'I wonder if Pete would stand any chance,' he suggested.

'Sure he would!' cried John. 'Petey's the swellest dog in town, ain't you, Petey?'

He ran to Pete, who was napping in the best chair in the house, despite Dad's orders that he be kept outdoors, and embraced him, rubbing his face against Pete's. Pete yawned, but endured it.

'Aw, sure, Petey'd win,' asserted Frank.

'I'll give you my new ribbon to put on him,' generously offered Sylvia.

Chuck scowled at her.

'Dogs don't wear ribbons,' he informed her, with the bitterness of the wholly misunderstood, ''ceptin' when they win 'em in a show.'

'If we could teach him some tricks ——' said John, in the tone of one expressing a hope too beautiful to be more than a dream.

Pete, realizing that he was the center of interest, blinked acknowledgment and yawned again. Little did he know what he was in for.

For two weeks the boys labored with Pete, with a patience they had never shown before. They did not

tell anyone outside the family of their plans. Pete was to be a complete surprise. Chuck went to the library for books about the training of dogs. He read of marvelous things which dogs could be taught to do, and was sure Pete was so exceptionally intelligent that he could learn to do them. He, and his brothers and sister, could picture the dismay of Slick Gilkey and Edward Willis and Snoopy Alkus and all the other kids, who were so sure they were going to get prizes in the pet show, when little Pete was led into the arena and, at a low command from his master, rose up on his hind feet, walked up to the judge, bowed to him, stood on his head, and then danced away, amid the cheers and delighted laughter of the multitude.

But they had never tried to train a dog before, and the instructions they could get at the Ourville Carnegie Library were meager. There was one book which told, with illustrations, of marvelous tricks performed by dogs, but nothing of how to teach them, except to say that one must be gentle, never lose his temper, and show infinite patience, and reward the dog when it successfully did the trick.

But if you've spent your own hard-earned nickel for a piece of liver with which to reward your dog when he performs his trick, and he never does perform it, and seems to be awfully bored by your hours of effort, you're going to give it to him for his dinner anyway, aren't you?

The first day of training resulted in imaginary gains on the part of the pupil. Everything he did which could be translated into understanding was so translated. The boys assured one another that Petey was learning fast. The second and third days they dog-

gedly persisted in their confident expressions of faith. But by the fourth day there was a certain hollowness about their assertions.

Of course it wasn't because Petey was dumb. They were too loyal to their beloved pup to suggest that. It was because they themselves were dumb. Chuck freely admitted that John was dumb and John as heartily insisted that it was Chuck who was dumb. Frank, being smaller than both, wisely refrained from expressing his opinions when both the elder trainers were exasperated and discouraged, but he looked as if he was thinking a good deal.

Only Sylvia kept the sublime, sweet faith she acquired when the boys first talked eagerly of what they would do with Pete. Patricia was her pet, but she wasn't going to take Patricia to the pet show for fear some big old meany of a dog would scare her.

It was Sylvia who let out the jealously guarded secret. The boys hadn't thought of warning her to breathe no whisper of their plans. In her innocence she spoke openly of how the boys were training Pete for the show, little realizing that the school was full of spies. For the Seymours were far from the only boys who were laying deep plans in secret. Edward Willis, for instance, had no pets of his own, but he had more spending money than any of the other boys in school. Three days before the show the whisper got out that Edward was going far afield to buy or rent a pet which would win the great sweepstakes prize — a bicycle.

Thus it was that the day before the show the Seymour boys found themselves openly ridiculed.

'Hey,' roared Slick Gilkey at Chuck, 'what's this about you gettin' to be a dog-trainer?'

Chuck blushed.

'Aw, I dunno,' he said noncommittally.

'Aw, you do know. You been tryin' to train that Scottie pup of yours to do tricks. Can he walk on his hind legs?'

'Well... ye-es... he *can*.' Hadn't Pete not only walked but danced on his hind legs at sight of marauding bigger dogs? The only trouble was that they couldn't get the dog to do anything on command.

Slick looked a little disappointed, but he laughed derisively.

'Well,' he chortled, 'he's gotta be mighty good to beat the one I got. I got the dog that won first prize in the Los Angeles dog show, an' can he do tricks!'

Chuck stared.

'How'd you get a dog like that?' he demanded.

'Never mind. I got him. I'll have him here tomorrow, an' you'll see what a real trick dog is.'

'Okay,' said Chuck, who had never got over shyness, and was glad to say anything to close the interview, which was being overheard by a score of eager listeners. But he could not close the painful interview. Snoopy Alkus was among the listeners, and his derision was even more stinging than Slick's.

'You kids are sure wastin' your time,' he informed Chuck. 'What do you know about trainin' dogs? It takes perfeshionuls to train dogs. Slick's got a dog that's won prizes everywhere. I seen it. An' that ain't all. I got a talkin' parrot.'

That was staggering and mystifying. Chuck knew that Slick Gilkey's only pet was a huge and ferocious dog. It wasn't fair for kids to go and get pets that didn't belong to 'em. It began to dawn on him that that was what had happened.

Slick, who had been waiting for the moment to strike the final blow, jeered.

'Yeah!' shouted Slick triumphantly, 'an' Edward Willis'll have us all beat twenty ways. Edward's gone an' bought a monkey — a real organ-grinder's monkey.'

That was too much. The amateur show had gone professional.

'Aw, well,' said Chuck nonchalantly, 'we weren't gettin' ready for this show. We're just startin' to train our pup for next year's show. Of course he can't do many tricks yet. But you just wait.'

It was a sad-eyed troupe of boys who left the Seymour house next day to go to the pet show. One by one they fondled Pete, to show him that they loved him just the same, and then they carefully shut him in the house, so that he could not follow them. They were not going to take a mere pup down to compete with professionally trained creatures of various kinds, but indignation was smoldering within them. They were going to take mental note of all the tricks and stratagems of Slick Gilkey, Snoopy Alkus, and Edward Willis. For there would be another pet show next year.

The Ourville school was planned as a community center, the only place in the little town with an auditorium large enough for several hundred people, a cafeteria big enough for the whole community, and a playground on which the children played baseball, tennis, handball, basketball, and volleyball by day and their elders played, by electric light, at night. There were seats for several hundred people on two sides of the baseball field, on which the pet show was

held. The first pet show had been held in the school building, but one snake had escaped and crawled into a teacher's desk, so after that the show was held on the baseball field.

Although the Seymour boys were aggrieved to the heart and were disdainful in manner, they were among the first to reach the field, and secured seats in the first row, spreading themselves so that no one could possibly squeeze in between them, yet they could easily sit closer and make room for Sylvia when she arrived, or for anyone else they might find it desirable to make room for.

The seats were the simplest of circus seats — long rows of two-inch planks set sixteen inches apart. When they were occupied you could see right through them, if you were close to them, for there was nothing between the planks to obstruct the view. Hank's legs reached all the way from his front row seat to the ground, but those of the other boys dangled.

The stands filled rapidly. Every now and then someone would look questioningly at the Seymour boys, as if to suggest that if they would sit closer together they could easily make room for another person, but they were blind to all such looks. They were resolutely spread, and held their ground until at last, just before the parade, Sylvia came skipping and tripping to the show.

The parade was an odd mixture of intimacies and surprises. Every boy in the crowd knew every youngster in the parade, and knew his or her pets as well. The parade was led by a boy on whose shoulders perched two pigeons. At intervals, probably in response to a shrug of the shoulders, they would rise

gracefully, circle about, and then alight on his shoulders again. Everyone knew the boy and knew that he raised pigeons, but no one had ever before seen him putting trained pigeons through their tricks.

Next came Marion Gale carrying an ornate bird cage, with a canary in it. The boys only sniffed at that. But they had to yield grudging applause when Snoopy Alkus came by with a gaudy parrot which perched its head on one side, seemed to stare directly at one, and then squawked:

‘Hey! You mutt! I mean you.’

When Snoopy paused just in front of the principal, and the obliging bird shouted those words, there was such a roar of laughter as made it seem that the contest was over.

But a few minutes later Slick Gilkey came by, leading a beautiful cocker spaniel which was walking on its hind legs.

‘Aw, that ain’t fair!’ Chuck burst out. ‘That’s Mrs. McKee’s champeen dog. He’s *borrowed* it!’

The secret was out. The pet show was not really a show of the exhibitors’ pets. It was a show of borrowed, rented, or recently acquired pets. The show had lost its amateur standing even if, like some college football teams, it still appeared to have it.

The fact became more apparent as the show progressed. After the parade, the contestants came before the judges one by one. Then Marion, carrying what looked like an ordinary canary, whistled a bar of ‘Yankee Doodle,’ and to the astonishment of everyone the bird whistled the tune clear through.

Indignation is not necessarily childlike, but no one else can feel as indignant as a child. The Seymour boys liked Marion, but were swept by such indigna-

tion that they shook with it. She had only done what others had done, but that was the trouble. When it came to actual pets, creatures trained or even fully possessed by those who exhibited them, their Pete would have stood a chance with any pet there. But Slick and Snoopy and Edward had conspired together. And no doubt Edward had passed the suggestion on to Marion, for that canary of hers certainly was borrowed, too. Indeed, they could hear a man sitting behind them receiving congratulations on the canary.

'That's Dickie, the most famous canary in the world,' the man asserted. 'He has won prizes in New York and London.'

With grim satisfaction, the Seymour boys noticed that the applause won by the canary seemed to worry Edward Willis. Maybe in suggesting a trick to Marion he had outstrategied himself. It was a little consoling to hope that she would get the first prize. The grand sweepstakes prize, the beloved bicycle, was the only one of high value, but it would be a triumph to win any prize. It simply seemed a shame for all the prizes to be won by unfair competitors. Of course, Marion was only a girl and therefore probably didn't know what sin was, but Slick and Edward and Snooty knew well enough that in previous pet shows nobody exhibited anything except his own pets. It was as if a pack of bandits — aided by a lovely female accomplice who did not realize how wicked they were — had dashed in and was robbing them of everything which eager young hopes had endeared.

They wore the you-too-Brutus look all through the presentation of Marion's canary, but at the conclusion Hank whispered:

'Clap hard. It may keep Edward from winnin' first.'

And they proceeded to hurt their hands.

But monkeys always have delighted civilized people more than has any other animal. Perhaps it is because of an ancient kinship; more probably it is merely because they are 'cute,' and most people find people and things that are cute much more entertaining than people and things that are merely right. When Edward came out, dressed as an organ-grinder and accompanied by a monkey trained by long experience to amuse crowds, the children who made up four fifths of the crowd could express themselves only in squeals, mere words being inadequate. After all, they saw dogs and birds every day, but they saw monkeys only when they went to circuses.

Hank arose disgustedly.

'There goes the bike,' he said.

'Yeah,' said Chuck, 'an' he's already got two bikes.' But he did not join in Hank's suggestion of retreat. He was going to stay there and suffer until the last.

'Doc' Waller was the sole judge. Doc was so big that nobody could dispute with him, and so genial that nobody wanted to. The time had come when he must make his decision, and the children grew tense and open-mouthed. He walked up to Marion and carefully inspected the canary, asking her questions about it, and they thought it was all over. But Doc passed on to Edward and the monkey.

'How did you train this monkey?' asked Doc.

'Oh, I just worked with him in the back yard,' said Edward cockily. Everyone laughed.

'How long have you had him?'

'Oh, not so long.'

'How long are you going to keep him?'

'Quite a while. I'll show you new tricks with him next year.'

Doc passed on, and the Seymour boys swallowed their hearts again. They didn't believe Edward. They felt like people in court, about to be robbed through a legal technicality, on statements which skirted the facts. Their faith that this is a world in which right prevails and God directs was a little shaken.

Doc walked about in deep thought. Evidently he couldn't make up his mind. It was a tense moment. Then he stopped, just in front of Chuck, but did not seem to see Chuck. He was staring at the ground.

'I'd like to see more of this contestant,' said the judge.

Marion giggled. Edward 'huhhed.' The Seymour boys stared at Doc, then looked the way his eyes were looking, in questioning wonder.

And there, squatted on the ground between Chuck's dangling feet, was Pete. Sylvia had left home after the boys, and had not closed the little dog in as tightly as they had. He had got out after she left, and doubtless had followed her to school. He had known he was not wanted there, and had kept out of sight, creeping under the grandstand from the rear. And after finding his master he had sat like a painted dog upon a painted scene, making no sound for fear of being ejected.

But as necks strained and all the people back in the stand asked what it was, as Pete was invisible to them, the dog Slick Gilkey had borrowed growled, and Pete leaped into action. He knew he was dis-

covered, and he had been repressing his instinctive desires so long that he was ready for an emotional outburst. As if he had been waiting for a cue, waiting for the moment when he could have the undivided attention of the crowd, Pete began to g-r-r-r like a coffee-grinder and leaped into the arena. There he rose to his hind legs, danced about on them, and pawed the air with his forefeet like a feinting pugilist. Around and around the bigger dog he danced, in a manner so undoglike that the well-trained cocker was as astonished and bewildered as anybody, and showed positive alarm.

The surprise, the timing, the cuteness of Pete, and the dismay of the cocker combined to send the crowd into such paroxysms of laughter and delight as no other animal had evoked. Chuck, fearing his pet would be eaten alive, leaped into the arena after Pete, and tried to gather him into his arms, but Pete side-stepped and danced away from him.

Then a great light dawned on Chuck. He saw that the crowd was more pleased with Pete than with all the other pets, and did not realize the little dog was only being natural. He made another ineffectual swoop for Pete, purposely ineffectual that time, and ordered:

‘Dance.’

Pete danced out of his reach, still growling and waving defiance at the other dog, but taking care not to get too close to it. That strategy compelled Pete to do his dancing in a series of circles. Suddenly inspired, Chuck began to whistle. The crowd thought Pete was dancing to the whistling, and clapped. Pete, who was no vainer than a peacock, became more and more excited.

The cocker was a well-trained animal, but he, too, was vain, and realized that Pete was stealing the show. Or perhaps, in dog language, Pete was growling fighting words at him. Anyhow, the cocker got out of control so suddenly that everyone was startled, and Pete most of all. The cocker leaped forward, and had not Slick had hold of the leash would have leaped on Pete. As it was, he seemed suspended in mid-air for an instant.

Pete, dancing on his hind legs, was stretching himself to his tallest when that unexpected lunge startled him, and his instinctive recoil made him fall over backward.

'Flipflop!' shouted Chuck.

He had never tried to teach Pete to 'flipflop.' But Pete was catlike in his ability to land on his feet. He did land on his feet, and again the friendly crowd interpreted his action as fulfillment of Chuck's order.

There was a tumult of applause, vocal, pedal, and manual. The completely unexpected and the completely informal, combined with cuteness, had captured the crowd.

Just then a huge and fierce police dog bounded out of the crowd. Chuck knew that dog. It was Slick Gilkey's own dog. It was a dangerous animal. It had demonstrated that it could break the neck of a big cat with a single snap. Alarmed, Chuck dropped to one knee and called:

'Here, Pete! Quick!'

Pete, too, had seen the fearsome police dog, and was awed. He leaped and landed squarely in Chuck's arms. Chuck instantly arose, but Pete wished to be as far from that police dog as possible. He climbed

up on Chuck's shoulder. Once there, he felt safe, and again assumed the bored, superior look which would have annoyed people if worn by any full-sized creature but seemed cute in one so small.

The whole crowd had been breathless for a moment as the police dog sprang into the arena, and once more was delighted with the cleverness of Pete.

Chuck stood there, looking the police dog sternly in the eyes but afraid to move. He was holding Pete as high out of reach as he could, but Pete was willing to climb higher. He was sitting on Chuck's shoulder, but his forefeet rested on Chuck's head. It was a comical tableau, once the danger was past, and the swift change from shudders to comedy accentuated the feeling of relief. Again there was a spontaneous and hearty outburst of clapping and laughter.

Then Doc Waller strode up to Chuck, grinning.

'I guess there's no doubt about which is the most popular pet here today,' he said. 'We give this dog the blue ribbon.'

Chuck looked at him in wonderment. He had never quite realized that Pete was a contender. He had thought Pete was pleasing the crowd because he was a complete outsider. The crowd always is interested when a spectator steals the show, and Chuck vaguely realized that. He hadn't dreamed that Pete was being considered for first honors.

Neither had Slick Gilkey, nor Edward, nor Snoopy. They raised an 'Aw, heck!' of protest. But Doc overruled them majestically.

'This is the only *bonyfied* pet in the money,' he declared. 'These others are just borrowed or rented for the show. In spite of that this dog has won by popularity. He has pleased the crowd most. His

training has come from his own master. We couldn't be fair if we didn't give him the sweepstakes prize.'

Again applause burst out. The blue ribbon on which 'Grand Sweepstakes' was printed in gold was brought.

'I never could tie ribbons,' said Doc. 'Marion, you tie it on — just to show there's no hard feeling because of your borrowed canary.'

'I'll be glad to,' said Marion, smiling — and perfectly composed.

Chuck wasn't perfectly composed. He still was holding Pete, and felt terribly conspicuous. His face burned, his ears buzzed, he felt a little unsteady. But he never had felt quite so happy in all his life.

But he had to say something and he felt sincerely modest.

'Thanks a lot,' he said. 'But I didn't really train Pete much. It's old Brownie, our old dog, did most of the trainin'.'

IO—OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES

AT THE age of eight, Sylvia Seymour suddenly became acutely clothes-conscious. She not only took note of her own clothes but keenly observed the clothes of others. And she was hurt by the fact that her mother did not wear as fine things as did Mrs. Magnus Gale, Marion's mother.

Mom had never gone in for social life in Ourville. She had too many children and too little money. But as the children got into school she became tremendously interested in the Parent-Teachers Association. There were quite a number of Mexican children in Ourville who needed a P.-T.A. to mother them, for they came to school underfed and underclothed. The P.-T.A. saw to it that every child got a bottle of milk at ten in the morning, whether he could pay for it or not, and that all those the school nurse selected received a substantial warm lunch in the school cafeteria at noon.

To finance such activities, the P.-T.A. had to have a big benefit show every year.

Mrs. Magnus Gale was president of the P.-T.A., and she soon learned that Mom was one of her most faithful workers. She also learned that Gregory Seymour, though a struggling writer, had friends worth knowing. The two women became good friends, and frequently called on one another.

Magnus Gale was a very successful lawyer, and everything in the Gale home was very nice. Marion, too, was very nice. She was four years older than Sylvia, and had learned most of the manners of a young lady in a home of culture. The idea came to Mom that it would be good for Sylvia, who spent most of her time with four rough-and-tumble brothers, to absorb a little of the atmosphere of the Gale home. So the next time Mrs. Gale phoned to ask Mom to a conference at her home, Mom said:

'Surely. I'll come right over . . . And may I bring Sylvia along?'

'Please do,' urged Mrs. Gale. 'Marion will be delighted.'

Marion was delighted. Dancing school and four older brothers who did everything but spoil her had taught Sylvia to be graceful and gracious, deft and resourceful. If Chuck and John, building model planes, suddenly stormed at her: 'Hey, you dumbbell, get out of here! You'll bust sump'un. Girls can't savvy stuff like this,' Sylvia never 'sassed' back at them. She merely smiled at them forgivingly, bent backward until her hands touched the floor, swung her feet over to complete a perfect handspring backward, and then went away in a series of cartwheels. None of the boys could do those things, and their outbursts turned to silent respect as they watched her. Sylvia could tap-dance, too. The boys didn't care so much for all that graceful stuff, but tap-dancing and handsprings were something.

Then, too, Sylvia was just enough younger than Marion to be almost adoring. Sylvia was invited to Marion's again, and again. And one night when Marion's parents were going to be out very late, she asked Sylvia over to spend the night with her.

Marion was a nice girl, but human. She saw that Sylvia was impressed by lovely clothes. She knew her mother had lovely clothes, and was proud of them. She wasn't too nice to take pleasure in impressing a little girl in whose household both furniture and clothes were strictly utilitarian. Sylvia was always attractively dressed and so was her mother, but beautiful furs, silks which proclaimed a disregard for money, and ethereal evening gowns were not for the Maison Seymour. Sylvia had never even seen such creations, and her unconcealed wonder at them made Marion turn just a little patronizing.

And then Sylvia was small enough to feel jealous, and deeply hurt.

Mom was too busy to notice anything like that, for Mom had her hands full. She had been honored with the chairmanship of the committee which was to stage the annual milk-fund benefit, the event the whole town was expected to attend, at fifty cents a head, to provide a welfare fund for the P.-T.A. And Mom had decided to stage a fashion show.

When depression was at its worst, the freelancing game had got so precarious that Dad had got a job as a publicity man in a motion-picture studio. In that job he had won the friendship not only of a score of famous actresses, but of the head of the wardrobe department, who treasured the costumes in which the rôles of queens and empresses and historic beauties had been played. He also had written one story which had won the undying gratitude of the head of the makeup department. Mom wasn't an asking sort of person, but for children — her own or anybody's — she would demand anything.

'If we can borrow a lot of those costumes,' she

said, 'and get that makeup man to doll up about thirty of our own girls — and maybe get one or two noted actors to appear in person — we can make enough at one time not only to feed and milk the hungry all year, but to buy shoes for quite a lot of them.'

Dad always grew a little hostile when asked to ask anyone else any favor. But he agreed to sound out some of the people concerned. To his pleased surprise, he found all of them ready to do anything they could for a lot of undernourished kiddies. Quite generally, motion-picture people wear their feelings on their sleeves. From producers down, they are sentimental people. When anyone they like appeals to their sentiment their generosity is likely to be surprising.

Not only did the wardrobe department manager and the makeup men co-operate, but a noted director offered to direct the fashion show, and Gene and Kathleen Lockhart offered to go to Ourville and present a comedy sketch.

Ourville hummed with excitement after that news began eddying through it. The chance for friendly and almost intimate contact with noted comedians interested everyone, but the young women of the town were more thrilled by the thought of showing their hidden dramatic quality. The director was going to look them over and select the ones who should wear various costumes, and then he was going to coach them in rehearsals. There would be rehearsals on Wednesday and Friday nights, and the show would be on Saturday night.

That was how the accident occurred.

On Wednesday afternoon a huge, shiny, inclosed

truck drove up to the Seymour house. Greg was alone at the time, for all the children were in school and Mom was at a committee meeting.

'Got thirty costumes from Nonpareil for you,' announced the truck-driver, looking on the unpretentious house with great disfavor. 'Where shall I take 'em?'

'Costumes?' murmured Dad. 'From Nonpareil? I thought they weren't coming out 'til Saturday.'

'I guess you thought wrong. My orders was to deliver 'em today. Where'll I take 'em?'

'Why, I suppose you'll have to leave them right here until I find out. You see, my wife is head of the committee, and she isn't here at the moment.'

'H'm!' said the driver. 'I hope you're insured. Those costumes are worth an awful lot of money.'

Dad had noticed the disapproving glance at his domicile, and the hint of condescension in the driver's manner.

'We'll take care of the costumes, all right,' he said crisply.

'Okay by me. All I want is a receipt. I got a case of phony stage jewelry too.'

The driver went to the rear end of the truck, unlocked it, and tenderly lifted out two shimmering and resplendent costumes. Dad, almost overpowered, carried them into the house. When he went out again the driver held two more costumes for him.

'Careful you don't step on one of 'em as you carry it in,' he warned.

Dad was being so careful that it was a wonder he didn't have an accident. Women's clothes always had been mysterious and awe-inspiring to him, and these were the most awe-inspiring clothes he had

ever seen. But despite his extreme caution he carried the thirty costumes in safely, and signed the receipt. The driver took it with the air of one who knew the worst was soon to happen, but washed his hands of the whole affair.

There was a long closet, the full length of the room, in the room shared by Mom and Dad. But there were very few clothes in it. Down the center of that closet ran a rod, from which the wardrobe of a queen might have been hung. Dad had such costumes as queen never wore on land or sea or anywhere but the screen, and he hung them, one by one, on that rod, pushing the things which had been there before back into a far corner.

Then he went back to his work and forgot all about the costumes. He was writing the big scene of a story he had to sell to pay his own milk bill.

By the time Mom got home the matter of the costumes had utterly departed from his memory.

Sylvia got home from school before the boys did, and the unerring instinct which leads children to the closet in which Christmas presents are hid led her to the closet in her mother's bedroom. She had to bite her tongue to be sure she was awake, and then she almost went into ecstasies. But when she heard noises below she gently closed the door and went downstairs. It might be best to wait until Mom came home and explained the miracle.

But Mom came home late, and had to throw some food on the table hastily, for she had to go back to the school that evening. The director, the makeup man, and a woman from the wardrobe department were to be out to select the girls who were to take

part in the fashion show. They were to bring with them the pictures and measurements of the actresses who had worn the costumes. The director would select the types, the makeup man would say which would make up best and the costumer would know which would best fit the costumes. For of course those magnificent costumes could not be altered except by the use of pins.

Of course Dad, the intermediary, had to go along with Mom to that important meeting.

'Oh,' said Sylvia; 'then I'll be lonesome. Can't I ask Marion over to spend the night with me?'

'Why not?' said Mom. 'You've been her guest overnight and this is a very good time... In the summertime we have plenty of bedding for all our beds... Yes, dear, ask her over if you wish.'

Nobody thought of mentioning the costumes to Mom, and Mom didn't even go up to her room. Cosmetics had little place in Mom's life, and she didn't have to change her dress. So she went away with Dad, in ignorance of the wonderful wardrobe hidden in her closet.

When Marion arrived, the boys, being so diffident that they were afraid of showing how glad they were to see her, were very rude to her. Marion coolly assumed a slightly superior air. That is a very effective answer to rudeness, except that it calls for more rudeness, which in turn calls for more superiority. Marion was a nice girl, but in the face of goading she became patronizing.

But Sylvia showed herself a perfect hostess.

'Let's go upstairs,' she said, with a look of cool dismissal for her brothers. 'I get to see plenty of

boys, but I don't get to play with a girl every day.'

Sylvia's dolls could not compare with Marion's dolls, and Marion was getting rather old for dolls, anyway. Sylvia's room was very simple as compared to Marion's, and all her possessions were campers' supplies compared to Marion's. But in Sylvia's room was a little bookcase containing more than thirty books, all the personal property of Sylvia Seymour, and she knew that gave her a certain standing, for Marion had no books of her own. Marion was frankly impressed.

'You mean they're all your very own?' she demanded.

'Of course,' said Sylvia. 'But you should see the boys' library. They have more than three hundred books of their own.'

'Besides all the books your mother and father have downstairs?'

'Of course.'

The Gales lived in a much nicer house, had much nicer furnishings, and many possessions the salesmen would call 'refinements' and 'evidences of culture.' But there probably weren't a dozen books of all kinds in their charming home. Most of her life Marion had felt a little superior, but now for the first time she felt definitely inferior. She vaguely realized that to people who own and love books all other people stand exposed and naked, no matter what their outward show of culture.

And it is human to say catty and even cruel things when one feels inferior. Marion giggled.

'Goodness!' she cried. 'I should think your folks would spend less on books and more on clothes.'

Sylvia wasn't hurt. She only smiled serenely.

'I wonder ——' she murmured.

'Wonder what?'

'I wonder if I might show you some things in Mother's room, now Mother is away.... Mother never likes to have us do anything that looks like showing off.'

'What kind of things?'

'Oh... pretty things.'

Nothing is more enticing than a mystery. Marion's lively interest was aroused. She waited for Sylvia to say more, but Sylvia didn't. So at last she said, as casually as she could:

'What kind of pretty things?'

'Oh, just some dresses and jewels and things.'

'Jewels!'

'Ye-e-es, a few.'

'Boy! I sure would like to see 'em.'

'We-e-ell, if you won't say a word about it.'

'I won't. I promise.'

'Not to anyone at all.'

'Of course I won't.'

'You see, when Mother and Daddy lived in New York and Paris they used to go out to lots of parties and things, but since they've lived here... well, Daddy has been too busy. And they always tell us children never to do anything osten — osten — never to do anything show-offy.'

'You better let me see 'em,' said Marion, 'or I'll think you're just talking kind of show-offy now.'

'All right,' said Sylvia sweetly. 'I'll show you. But let's tiptoe and be quiet.'

She led the way on tiptoe, and Marion followed,

almost breathlessly. Sylvia switched on the light in her mother's room and softly closed the door. She opened a drawer in her father's chiffonier and took out a flashlight.

'It's kind of dark in the closet,' she said, 'and we mustn't bring the things out here. We mustn't handle them at all.'

'All right.'

Sylvia opened the closet door and Marion stood spellbound. Before her were half a dozen evening gowns of such exquisite, shimmering beauty that she knew at a glance there was nothing in her mother's wardrobe to compare with them. She couldn't see them very well — merely the edges of them as they hung in a long row. She wished she could take one down and look at it, but she was so awed she did not dare suggest it. For the evening gowns were only a small part of the show. On one side of them hung gowns of brocaded satin and velvet and silks which were a new experience in her life, and on the other were coats and capes of utter magnificence. Even Mrs. Morgan Willis in all her glory had never been arrayed in such as those.

Sylvia drew her back.

'You mustn't touch anything,' she warned again. 'Here, you hold the flashlight, and I'll show you something else.'

Then Sylvia drew out a case more than two feet long and about eight inches wide, and opened it — and to Marion it seemed that the room was filled with lightnings from jewels fit for the coronation of a queen.

'Oh!' she cried.

'Sh!' warned Sylvia, and hurriedly closed the jewel

case and thrust it back in the closet, far out of sight. 'You mustn't tell a single soul, because mother wouldn't like it at all.'

Marion was old enough to go to the fashion show Saturday night, but she didn't recognize any of the costumes of which she had seen only the edges. Her mother was enraptured by them, but Marion wasn't so greatly impressed.

'Do you know,' she whispered to her mother, 'Mrs. Seymour has a whole closet full of things lovelier and finer than those. She never wears them because they're not going out much now. But you simply ought to see some of the beautiful jewelry she has, too.'

'Really?' said Mrs. Gale incredulously.

'Yes, indeedy,' declared Marion. 'I never saw such beautiful things in my life. But Sylvia showed them to me in confidence — she said her folks wouldn't like it. She said that when they lived in New York and Paris they used to go out lots, but they never cared much for society here.'

'How strange!' said Mrs. Gale. 'Mrs. Seymour is always very neatly dressed, but very simply.'

'Yes,' agreed Marion eagerly, for she had learned a new word she wished to use. 'You see, they're awfully afraid of being osten-tacious . . . Sylvia wouldn't show 'em to me 'til I promised not to tell a soul. . . .'

So the whisper crept around Ourville that the Seymours were people of background, people whose social standing had been so high that the small affairs of a small town failed to interest them. They had been too nice to say so, or to even intimate it, but if they

cared to do so they could be very ostentatious in the matter of dress.

After that it wasn't very hard for Ourville to figure out the reason why. From words dropped here and there they knew the secret. The Seymours had sacrificed all their worldly ambitions because of a greater ambition. Gregory had come there to write a book. The hack magazine writing the whole town had learned about was merely a side line — almost a camouflage. But in the sanctuary of his messy little workshop he was laboring soulfully on a magnum opus.

And the Seymours never dreamed what was causing a new feeling toward them which they sensed throughout the little town, a feeling of respect which was both pleasant and inspiring. Life began to take on warmer colors. For all the great joys of life, from making love to creating masterpieces, come from doing something so as to win and merit someone else's respect.

Greg became conscious of the fact that people all about him felt he was capable of something far better than he was doing, and almost unconsciously began an effort to live up to their expectations.

II—THE CHIVALRY OF ADOLESCENCE

THERE was something in the air about that time which made Mom and Dad agree that Dad should have a dinner suit. All of a sudden people were inviting them out. There had been one dinner to P. G. Wodehouse at the Authors Club in Hollywood which they wished to attend, but Dad had no evening clothes. Mom had something which would do, or she could make it over so it would do, but Dad had only a business suit and some hiking clothes. So when a story Dad counted on to sell for two hundred and fifty dollars sold for four hundred, they decided to equip themselves for the next such emergency.

Three hundred dollars of the money went before they realized it, but then they felt they could go almost anywhere without embarrassment, and each assured the other it was worth it, even if they did have to pinch for a month or two.

But then there was a sudden lull in invitations. They had declined so many that people had decided it was no use inviting them. Nobody asked them to any affair at which evening clothes were needed. The finery for which they had so strained their resources hung idle in a closet.

To Hank, their eldest son, that seemed a fearful waste. Just as money can be spent without one's

realizing it, children can grow up without one's realizing it. Hank was nearing the age of sixteen and was as tall as his father. He had learned to dance. He had discovered that girls who talked about 'formals' were not necessarily plagues to be avoided.

When Hank was invited to a party given by the sub-deb set at the Côte d'Azur Beach Club he felt just as Dad did when invited to that dinner to Wodehouse to which he couldn't go. And finally he determined that he would go, not so much for his own sake, but just to give that dinner suit of his father's a chance to get into society.

He did not tell Dad of that decision. He thought of telling him, but decided that Dad might not fully understand. Dad still couldn't realize that he had become a man. Sometimes he didn't want Dad to realize it, because Dad had a theory that a man should do enough work to earn his keep, and Hank had so many more important things to do that he could not find much time for work. If he asked Dad if he could use the new and unused raiment Dad probably would say no, so it was much safer to just take it for granted it would be all right with Dad, and dress and disappear before Dad knew about it.

So it happened that one evening Dad opened a drawer in his chiffonier to get a fresh handkerchief, and stared disapprovingly.

'H'm!' he exclaimed. 'Somebody has been rummaging here... and my two fine linen handkerchiefs are gone — both of 'em!'

Mom looked sorry and apologetic.

'I suppose it was Hank,' she said. 'He's going to his first real dancing party tonight, over at the Côte d'Azur, and wished very much to be dressed up.... He asked me if I thought he might wear your overcoat.'

‘Overcoat? A warm evening like this?’

‘Well, he said that driving — in an open car — over on the beach — it might get pretty cold... Anyway, I let him take it, and he was all muffled up when a carful of other youngsters called for him.’

Hank could put things over on Mom, but Dad, having been a boy himself, had a much more suspicious nature.

‘Maybe he wore an overcoat as one would a mantle of charity,’ he said, ‘— to cover a multitude of sins. Let’s see what else of mine he took... Ye gods! He’s got away with my silk socks, too — my dress socks!’

‘Why, the rascal!’

‘Jee-hoshaphat! He’s taken everything he could lay his hands on. Why I even believe —’

Dad hesitated to say what he believed. He swung away from the chiffonier into his dressing closet.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked Mom anxiously.

‘Yes,’ snapped Dad. ‘He has! He has taken my patent leather shoes, too. Good heavens! Has that boy grown up to my shoes?’

‘Yes, I think he has.’

And then Dad fairly staggered out of the closet.

‘He’s got my dress suit!’ he hoarsely whispered. ‘That’s why he wanted an overcoat — to hide the evening clothes.’

‘Oh, surely,’ protested Mom, ‘he wouldn’t.’

‘That pirate!’ cried Dad, ‘has made a clean sweep of all the finery it took me long years to accumulate. He is wearing my pleated evening shirt, that I’ve never worn yet; my evening clothes, that I’ve never worn yet; my two-dollar-a-pair silk socks, that I’ve never worn yet; my fifteen-dollar shoes, that I’ve

never worn yet. I suppose from now on I'll be able to call my soul my own, but nothing else.'

In the meantime Hank, at the beach club, thought he was upholding the honor of the family. He also thought he was making the hit of his life. His tuxedo was rather roomy, but it fitted well around the shoulders. He had had to belt the trousers in at the waist, and occasionally one caught glimpses of the belt under his vest. But it was a high-school crowd, and borrowed or rented evening clothes are far from uncommon at dances for high-school crowds. So Hank was getting along so well that he even got three dances with Helen Griswald, who suddenly had become his dream girl. Helen was the niece of Norman Griswald, the only multimillionaire in Ourville, who had come to live with him after his wife became an invalid. Therefore she lived in splendor and was driven to and from school by a liveried chauffeur, and the other youngsters stood a little in awe of her background.

It was an evening of joy and triumph for Hank, and he had grown a little giddy with success when, a little before midnight, the cry came from the veranda:

'The grunion are running! The grunion are running!'

In the spring the grunion's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love, and when that happens a million people along the coast of Southern California suffer an attack of moon madness. The grunion is a fish something like a sardine which, when mature, averages five or six inches in length. Grunion know nothing of tide tables or astronomy, but when the

moon reaches its fullest and the night tide reaches its highest they know that the moment for mating has come. Then innumerable schools of grunion seek the land. When a wave comes which will roll far back on the sandy beach the grunion ride it in, and when it sweeps out again Mrs. Grunion remains behind to deposit eggs in the sand. That takes only a moment, for fish must be the world's models for promptness, hardly giving breathing time to either their pleasures or their duties. Apparently the duty of perpetuating their species is the only one they have, and that only at certain seasons, but when the next big wave rolls up on the beach they are ready to ride it back to the ocean.

Whenever it is believed the grunion are to run, people along one hundred and fifty miles of coast go out to meet them halfway, and sometimes more than halfway. Somehow the catching of fish has always filled most people with eagerness and excitement, and the capturing with bare hands of little fish which are astonishingly agile on land is the most exciting form of fishing in which any crowd can participate. It is not unusual to see a hundred motor cars drawn up so that their headlights will flood the beach, while all the men, women, and children who came in those cars scramble for grunion as if they were nuggets of gold. Shrieks of triumph and disappointment tear the air. Grunion seem almost as much at home on wet sand as in water, and once they get into even half an inch of water they are far quicker than the human eye. Over the wet sand they go flipping and zigzagging, and even if one gets his hands on one it is hard to hold.

Yet there are plenty of people living on or near

beaches who never saw a grunion. Time after time they have heard that the grunion were to run and have gone out to see them, only to be disappointed after hours of waiting. A whole school of grunion may come ashore, to the feverish delight of the expectant crowd at one point, but not a single little fish may be seen only a quarter mile up the beach. The grunion are supposed to run three nights in succession, then to vanish for a month, and then to run another three nights, but to many thousands of people who flock to the beaches it appears that they are whimsical fish, very likely to change their minds without notice. Indeed, some people who live close to beaches rather suspect that grunion are a myth.

Hank Seymour had never seen grunion, though several times he had been with parties out to catch them. He was dancing with Helen Griswald when the announcement that grunion were running rang through the clubhouse.

'Oh!' cried Helen, 'I never have seen them. They say they're awfully pretty.'

'I'll catch you six for breakfast,' gallantly vowed Hank.

She looked at him as at a hero.

'Oh, will you?' she murmured ecstatically.

Hank grew dizzy. It was his evening of triumph. His evening clothes, as he mentally put it, were going over big — and he did not realize that many of those present noticed how much too big. For the belt he had had to put around the trousers to garner them in at the waist caused a certain bulging out at the hips. The boys who had failed to get dances with Helen because Hank had three found comfort in

whispering those facts to one another, and did not try hard to keep the secret from spreading.

Hank only sensed an atmosphere of envy, though. It seemed to him that all was going well, that his superior abilities were making him the Bill of the ball, so to speak. He thought of himself as a dashing figure, gay and debonair and gallant. He remembered what made Sir Walter Raleigh famous. One had only to seize the right moment to render courtly service and his repute had come. Hank believed his right moment had arrived. At any rate, he would show he was no idle bluffer.

According to Lord Byron's report, the opening guns of the battle of Waterloo brought no response, at first, save cries of 'On with the dance.' But the announcement that grunion were running struck the dancers at Côte d'Azur as much more important. The dance ended in midswing. The dancers rushed outdoors so precipitately that the orchestra stopped playing and, in a moment, followed. A cry of 'Fire!' could hardly have caused more excitement. A dozen boys moved their cars so that the headlights flooded the beach in front of the clubhouse. The waves were coming up within a few feet of the sun porch, and the eager spectators crowded against the low wall in which the porch ended, too eager to look over it to even drag seats forward, at first.

Hank could see nothing but the breaking surf. Only one boy present, Al Shroder, had ever seen grunion running, and his importance suddenly began to dim Hank's.

'Don't expect to see 'em in the water,' he advised. 'Fix your eyes on a wave that comes far in. Then,

just as it gives its last gasp on the shore and starts to recede, look at the place where it reached its high-water mark. You'll see some fish flipping about there.... Look! There's one!

'Where?' cried Helen, dropping Hank's arm, to which she had been clinging, and going to the new man of the hour.

'There. Don't you see it? Look there.'

She couldn't see it. But Hank did. And he felt that it was a moment to do or die.

'I'll get you some,' he announced, leaping over the wall. All those other guys had been chicken about leaping over the wall.

A big wave leaped at him and he danced out of its reach. Everyone laughed. He had regained the spotlight. He would show 'em.

The wave broke almost at his feet. He was gracefully leaping away from it when he caught the flash of silver lightning almost within reach. That receding wave had beached a score of fish in a nest of seaweed.

He had never dreamed that fish on land could move with such dazzling speed. They darted away from him like little silver arrows.

He sprang for them with outspread fingers, but they were darting in all directions. He seized one, but before he could close his fingers on it, it slipped away. He sprang after it, but a big, mothering wave was racing to its rescue. The fish leaped into the wave and was lost.

The spectators laughed and called out advice. Especially did the boys who weren't game to get down there and chase the fish shout plenty of advice.

Another wave swept up, and Hank danced out of its reach. The highest reach of that wave, though, was not where Hank was but about fifty feet to the south. Hank hit on a strategic idea. He ran over toward the place where that wave was about to start to recede. And then he cried out in triumph. It was leaving about forty quicksilver fish behind it. As the wave swept back he would get between the fish and the ocean, and nothing could keep him from catching a few of them.

He backed toward the ocean, facing the darting fish and trying to outdart them. At last he got a firm grip on one, and no miner discovering a nugget could have felt more exalted. Everyone on the porch was shouting at him, but he would show them all. His shout of triumph rang louder than all their shouts. He held up the fish for all to see.

Just then the big wave which had been coming up behind him, and about which those on the porch had been shouting, slapped him so violently and unexpectedly that he was swept off his feet. Clawing at the air in an effort to regain his balance, he let the one fish get away. But the effort was useless. He had been executing a sort of war dance when the wave struck him, and he could not have withstood a wave like that without being firmly braced. He went down and the wave broke over him, and so did a wave of laughter from the porch.

Hank wanted to cry, but he was too big for that. He wanted to moan out his worries and his fears to some sympathetic soul, for he knew Dad's wrath would be fearsome. Had he only secured Dad's permission to wear his clothes all would have been much

simpler, but if anyone helped himself to anyone else's property without permission Dad grew stern and often furious. The last time he had taken John's bike without permission — and got a puncture — Dad had given him both a painful lecture and a fine, charging the repair of the tire to Hank's allowance. There was no telling what he might do about that suit.

Most of all, Hank wanted to leave that place and do what he could toward drying out. The damage could not be concealed, but it might not be irreparable. He vaguely realized that patent leather shoes and clothes of good quality might stand one ducking very well, but might be pretty badly hurt by repeated duckings. But there came a taunting laugh from Al Shroder — Al, who was so prissy careful with his clothes that when he was wearing a new suit he would not even sit. He would stand and stand practically all the time, for fear of spoiling the perfect line of those trousers at the knees.

They were all taunting him, all being merry at his expense. And even Helen Griswald, the woman for whom he had risked all and was suffering all, was laughing! He heard her voice, even in that din, as she almost squealed to Al:

'He promised to get me six grunion for breakfast.'

'Yeah!' bellowed Al — Al, who wouldn't have risked a speck of water on his dress clothes for fifty Queen Elizabeths — ''ow 'bout them fish for Helen's breakfast?'

'*Them* fish. The guy didn't even know grammar! He might be sorter swell, but he was just an ignorant mutt. By golly, he'd show 'em!'

Hank became gay and debonair and daring. He turned his humiliation into his show. He performed

antics on the beach. There was not one boy there to whom a tuxedo suit did not seem the achievement of a lifetime, the ultimate end of all ambitions.

The liberties Hank was taking with the once lovely suit he was wearing cast a sort of awe over them. It was like seeing a man clowning on the way to the gallows. The guy might be a fool, but he certainly was game and reckless.

Hank caught another grunion, and another, and flaunted them.

'I'll get you your breakfast, all right, Helen,' he called.

One of the fish squirmed out of his hand at that moment, and the girls laughed, while the boys jeered openly. Hank recaptured it, though, and stuck it into a pocket. He was learning the technique of the sport and soon caught another. It really was exciting, and he forgot his troubles.

Soon he had six and proudly took them to Helen.

'There, milady!' he cried, as he drew two of them out of a pocket.

But Helen squealed and shrank away.

'Don't let them touch me!' she cried. 'I wouldn't touch one of the slimy things for anything!'

Hank was humiliated and hurt to the heart. That was the way women were. They would tempt and dare a feller to the brink of ruin and then act as if it wasn't all their doing. He saw through them. He would never have any use for them from that time on.

But he was a resourceful lad, and in his bedraggled condition he began to see his alibi. A fishermen's pier shot out into the water in front of the clubhouse. When he got home, at two in the morning, he didn't

enter softly and burglariously. He made a little extra noise. So, as he came up the stairs, Mom called:

‘Did you have a good time, Hank?’

Hank went straight to Dad and Mom’s door and opened it, emitting a hollow cough.

‘Yes and no,’ he replied. ‘I had a swell time most of the time. But just before we came home we all went out on the pier. And some of them — I mean those dumbbells — got to playin’ and shovin’ and I fell off the pier!’

‘Why, you poor boy!’ cried Mom.

‘It sure was good that I’m a pretty good swimmer,’ admitted Hank, ‘for we were out far enough for some pretty big waves to roll me around.’

So Mom got up and made hot lemonade for Hank, and he was put to bed with tenderness and sympathy. But the next day Dad found four very dead grunion in the pocket of his tuxedo coat, and it was a good while before either Dad or the suit got over that. You may steam, you may dry-clean a suit as you will, but the scent of dead grunion will cling round it still.

I 2—THE PLAN THAT ALMOST SUCCEEDED

WITH grim and Scottish persistence, Gregory Seymour was always trying to save a little money. He never had saved any yet, but he had often gone through the motions. 'All the success of this world,' he would declare, 'results from some form of thrift, the willingness to pay the price of sacrifice to-day for the reward we wish tomorrow.' Dad liked to write observations like that, and he was a typical writer — the truths he wrote himself impressed him deeply. He started savings accounts for all the children on their birthdays, but all those accounts suffered from arrested development.

The day school ended he came home from the post-office with such a satisfied look on his face that Mom thought he had sold a story. He often sold two or three stories a month now, but the market was still so uncertain that a sale always gave him a thrill.

'The Carsons are going out to their ranch for the summer,' he said, 'and they offer to take Frank and Sylvia along for a month if they want to go. They've never been where they could get acquainted with horses and cows and chickens. I think they would find it very interesting. They can drink a gallon of milk a day if they wish to, and they will be surrounded by fruit. It will be good for them in every way — and it will

save us some money. When Chuck and John go to the Scout camp at Catalina our family will be reduced so that maybe we can afford a vacation at the beach.'

Of course Frank and Sylvia wished to go. The romance in the name of 'ranch' decided that. Had it been a 'farm' they might have hesitated. In California any half acre on which chickens, flowers for market, or even goldfish are raised is called a ranch, but magic clings 'round the name still. The Carson ranch was what would be called a farm in any less romantic State. But the children looked forward to their visit there as a great adventure.

Frank and Sylvia always took a good time with them wherever they went. They could invent their own fun. Both were imaginative, and any time they didn't enjoy being themselves they could imagine they were someone else. Sylvia had been about all the princesses and fairy queens that she had heard about, or that Frank had heard about. She also had been Pocahontas, and any number of other characters of history. Frank, at the age of ten, was so chivalrous (without knowing it) that all smaller children found him the ideal playmate. He not only never imposed on them or bullied them, but seemed to consider himself their natural protector. He was blessed with a pleasant aggressiveness which did not become officiousness.

At that time Gregory was writing a series of interviews with famous people, for a magazine. But it seemed to him that Frank, at the age of ten, was more worth writing about than most of the people he had met who had made their mark or their pile. He was so much a child and yet so much a man. He was a babe in innocence yet more than a man in integrity.

Once in his life, misled by older boys, he had done something pretty bad, and when he realized he had deserted the standards of his house he marched upstairs to his father and said: 'Here! Lick me!' He wanted to take his punishment and purge his soul. That was before he was nine years old. Greg saw that he sincerely wished to make atonement, and let him. Frank took a hard whipping without a cry, but the man who administered it was the proudest dad in the world.

When he thought of Frank and Sylvia, Greg realized what a mess we grownups and our forbears for a million years have made of life. When Frank reached twenty he could not have the innocence he had at ten, and it would be a miracle if he still had the faith. Like the older boys who misled him when he was eight, older people continually would be trying to teach him things he shouldn't do. He would see then that many of his idols had feet of clay, and might turn the vision-distorting spectacles of cynicism on all of his bright ideals. He would see that some people set the welfare of the world at naught in order to acquire personal gain, and are honored and envied for it. He would see that lawyers who grow rich through nullifying the law and politicians who grow rich through cheating the people, rise to places of distinction. Gregory had faith that his little lad of ten would grow up to be a good and useful man, but he could not remain as perfect and untarnished by the world as he was then. He could not because most of those who were older and should be wiser and kinder would continually be setting him the wrong examples.

'If only we grownups could learn from children of ten instead of always trying to teach them something,'

he thought, 'the world might be a great deal better. For who are we of the passing generation to teach anyone? What have we done with life which justifies us in setting ourselves up as examples? We have plunged open-armed into the world to hug blemishes to our breasts and make them ours. At great cost we have defiled ourselves, and grown boastful of much that is worst in us. Yet we hardly have the grace to wash our hands before molding the beautiful plastic clay of the children who must take our places not so many years from now — our places in the perpetual relay race which must mean either the defeat or the glory of the human race.'

But there was plenty of wholesome mischief in Frank and Sylvia. They hadn't been on the ranch a day when Frank was severely reprimanded for riding a calf which wasn't old enough to be ridden. He knew that the riding of calves was featured in rodeos, and thought he saw a chance to train for a career as a rodeo performer.

Sylvia, too, was scolded for getting too motherly with baby chicks.

In the barn they discovered a thrilling new sport. They could leap from what seemed dizzying heights if there was plenty of loose hay to alight on. They got so enthusiastic about that that they dragged down more and more hay. They imagined the barn was a big building in the city and was on fire, and they were having to save themselves by leaping into a net. They worked out quite a drama — and had a three-foot cushion of hay on the floor of the barn to catch them when they leaped from the loft.

They forgot to clean up the hay when they tired of

the game, but hardly had they disappeared in quest of new adventures when a number of obliging cows went in through the door they had left open and began to clean it up for them. The cows were stuffed to the danger point before Ernie, the hired man, discovered them.

Mr. Carson made one serious mistake. He didn't tell the children about his watermelons. He told them about everything else on the one hundred and sixty acres, but he thought it might be best not to tell them about the melons. He was very proud of his watermelons, for sandy loam and sunshine and irrigation can produce marvelous melons. He knew there was an affinity between boys and watermelons, and he didn't wish any profane hands laid on those. They were hidden inside a field of corn, but the corn was only a few rows deep — behind that camouflage all was watermelons.

Even when Frank remembered the fine melons Mr. Carson had brought them once, the summer before, and asked if he didn't have any melons, Mr. Carson said:

'No, no! No melons this year!'

Mr. Carson should have taken the children directly to that watermelon patch and enlisted them as co-conspirators.

'This,' he should have whispered, 'looks like an innocent cornfield. But within it we have secreted treasure. If we didn't have these melons hidden low and vile people might come in and steal them. But no one knows about them except you and I and Ernie, the hired man. I want you children to help me keep this secret, and guard these melons, for they won't be

ripe until July, and if anyone bothers them now it will be too bad.'

Had he talked to them like that, all would have gone extremely well. But Mr. Carson pretended to be quite frank with his guests, and yet kept his most thrilling treasure hidden.

He should have known that an exploring boy of ten and a girl of eight would find not only everything on the place which he knew about, but quite a few things he didn't know about.

The barn and the living toys in the barnyard charmed them so that they never explored the cornfield until the day before they left. They had enjoyed mechanical horses and chickens and pigs before, but the living ones were sources of rare delight and absorbing interest. They wanted to catch them and make sure for themselves that they didn't have to be wound up the same way the toy ones did. For days they seemed to be oblivious of the cornfield, but it was just because they were too busy to pay any attention to it. They saw it all the time, and their sense of duty was so strong that they would not dream of returning to their home without exploring it.

The day before they had to leave Frank announced, decisively:

'Sylvia, we ain't been up in that cornfield yet.'

Sylvia looked wistfully at the brood of bright-yellow chicks scurrying about a portly and dignified red hen. They didn't seem to take after their mother at all in coloring, and she was wondering if they were just adopted chicks. She rather inclined to that idea, because poor little orphaned chicks were much more romantic than those with parents to look after them. But she knew that the mystery of the unknown, the

lure of terra incognita, would be irresistible to Frank and, according to his standards, should be irresistible to her. She cast yearning glances behind her, but she dutifully went along to the cornfield with her playmate.

She was amply rewarded. Hardly had she and Frank begun to explore the cornfield when they discovered a great big patch of wild watermelons, of which, apparently, Mr. Carson and Ernie were ignorant.

'Oh, boy!' exclaimed Frank. 'Let's get an extra nice one, and take it back to Mr. Carson for a s'prise.'

He had his Scout knife with him. They picked out one of the largest melons and he plugged it generously. It would be at least a month before any of the melons in that patch were ripe, and the plug he cut out of that one was as green as the outside of the melon.

When Frank and Sylvia determined on any good deed they were not easily discouraged. It would be a triumph to lug a fine, ripe melon in to Mr. Carson, who didn't seem to dream there was a melon on the whole place. It would be a nice token of appreciation. So they spent more than an hour in diligent search. They paid no attention to the small and spindling melons, but pounced on every one which looked exceptionally large and thrifty, and cut a generous plug out of it.

But perseverance doesn't always bring success. At the end of an arduous hour they had found no melon which was even half ripe. They had tasted several, to make doubly sure, but the samples had been acridly disappointing.

When at last they gave up, the field was littered

with plugs cut out of melons. Then, as Frank gazed about, the first realization came to him that the field was large and looked as if it might have been planted. Yes, it was just possible that those were not wild melons. Even though Mr. Carson had said, 'No melons this year,' they might not all be mere volunteers. He did not like to think that Mr. Carson had deceived them, but he had learned that it is not unusual for grownups to fail to hold the high conceptions of honor which they strive to inculcate in children. He had known his parents to practice certain deceptions on the children, so it dawned on him that Mr. Carson might be human, too.

Anyway, it would be a nice gesture to clean up all those plugs which were lying on the ground.

'Sylvie,' he said, 'let's put back all the plugs, real careful, and maybe the watermelons will keep on growin' all right.'

They not only carefully replaced the plugs, but turned the melons over, so that the plugged spots were not visible.

Farmers often turn over their big melons, so that the sun will sweeten both sides of them, so when Mr. Carson and Ernie, the hired man, saw the turned melons later each believed the other had been thoughtful, and that all was well in the melon patch.

The day after Frank and Sylvia tried so hard to find a nice surprise for Mr. Carson, something very unusual happened. A heavy rain fell. Southern Californians think they can count on complete lack of rain between the middle of May and the middle of October. That is why Hollywood Bowl exists. Where three months or more of clear weather can be counted

on, it is possible to arrange a series of outdoor concerts for eight or ten weeks, with an orchestra of one hundred and ten fine musicians and some of the best soloists alive. But where the sea is on one side and mountains are on the other, and desert lower than sea level is just beyond the mountains, freak local showers are likely to be swept in or sucked in from the ocean at any time. When a heavily laden cloud from the Gulf of California meets a mountain it has to climb, the changes in altitude and temperature do the rest.

The rain didn't worry Mr. Carson and Ernie. It delighted them. It rained so that water stood a couple of inches deep on the melon patch, but they knew it would sink into the sandy loam very soon. It was better than heavy irrigation. It was just the thing needed to assure size and lusciousness to the melons just beginning to ripen.

When Gregory Seymour went out to take the children home Mr. Carson assured him they had been pleasing visitors. He spoke so highly of them that Dad became overconfident.

'Well, if any little thing turns up in which they cost you money,' he said, 'just let me know and we'll straighten it out.'

'All right,' agreed Carson. 'But I don't think there's any concealed damage. They were full of healthy mischief, but they never did any real harm.'

Four weeks later Carson was going to town, and he and Ernie decided they could harvest and market a truckload of fine melons. They went joyfully to the concealed melon patch and Carson selected one

of the noblest of the melons. He thumped it, and it sounded just the way a ripe melon should.

'As the first fruits of the field,' he said, 'we'll eat this one ourselves. Split it open, Ernie.'

Ernie produced a knife and split the melon. As it began to open like a great red mouth the two men's eyes danced, and their tongues watered. There was ecstatic expectancy in the 'Ah' with which they drew in their breath. But as the final crisp splitting report came from the melon, and it lay before them in two pieces, their looks and utterances suddenly were stricken with dismay. On what had been the under side of the melon a spot as big as Ernie's fist was rotted.

They split another fine melon, and it, too, was rotted on the under side. Then they discovered that it had been plugged, and the plug carefully turned under. They went to melon after melon and found that all had been plugged.

'The kids must 'a' done that, just before that late rain,' said Ernie.

Mr. Carson didn't take a load of melons to town that day. He took only one melon and a heavy heart. He had been proud of his melons, but the biggest and finest and earliest had all been spoiled. In a week or so there would be other melons, but the joy and the profit on which he had counted were gone. And there is something about disappointment which greatly magnifies our losses. It seemed to Carson that about the finest melon crop ever raised in Southern California had been ruined.

He stopped at the Seymour house. Dad and Mom greeted him heartily. Dad had just sold a story John and Chuck were away at summer camp, and

Hank had a two-week job at a mountain lodge. So Mom and Dad were planning a trip to Catalina Island. A thousand times they had seen Catalina Island against the sunset sky, and had longed to visit it, but it is expensive to go visiting with a whole army, so they had never felt they could afford it before. They felt that Carson had helped them start the summer inexpensively, and beamed on him.

But Carson showed them the sample melon he had brought. He told them that one hundred and forty-nine of his finest melons had been plugged like that. When it comes to counting our wrongs, all of us have a gift for multiplication which is not ours when we count our blessings, and Carson was no exception. He honestly felt, and his narrative made it appear, that a priceless crop had been ruined by the mischief of two children.

‘I don’t like to mention it,’ said Carson, ‘but you said that if any damage turned up you wanted to know about it ——’

‘Yes, yes, of course,’ said Dad. ‘Would — would fifty dollars cover your damage?’

Carson brightened perceptibly.

‘Why, yes, I think it would,’ he said. Then, with a fine show of generosity he added:

‘I wouldn’t let you pay more’n that. No, sir, I wouldn’t.’

As a matter of fact, that was about as much as the melons would have brought at retail, and Carson, of course, would have sold them at wholesale. But Dad never thought of that until afterward. He paid Carson the fifty dollars — and the Seymours didn’t go to Catalina.

13—YOU CAN'T BELIEVE YOUR OWN EYES

IN THE summer the young boy's fancy turns to thoughts of cooling drinks, and when John came home and reported that Roberts's Market was giving away samples of root beer extract the four Seymour boys decided to go after samples at once. They even got Sylvia to go along and get a sample. And that inspired them to get half a dozen other people they saw approaching the store to ask for samples, of which the boys relieved them when they came out. It was an old Seymourish custom, started once when the new bakery was giving a toy balloon with every order. At that time the boys got even Mr. Jaffery, who had only one leg and was almost ninety years old, to get a toy balloon. The technique had been developed by other similar strategies, and was so perfected that when they finally left their ambush just around the corner from Roberts's Market they were loaded with samples enough to make an ocean of root beer.

'You'll have to make it yourselves,' said Mom. 'I'm entirely too busy.'

'Surely, they can make it,' agreed Dad. 'I remember making it when I was a boy. At least, I helped to make it. And I remember a little special trick, boys. If you put two raisins in the bottom of every bottle the beer will have a little extra zest and tingle.'

'You'd better just make a gallon or two, to start with,' said Mom. 'Indeed, there aren't enough bottles in the house for more than that.'

'Oh, we can get plenty of bottles,' said John. 'Tomorrow's tin can day. We can take my wagon and go around and fill it up with dandy bottles.'

As has been revealed before in this narrative, rubbish day was the day when boxes of rubbish were put out throughout Ourville, to be carted away by the rubbish truck. In the residence districts it was commonly known as tin can day, because cans formed a large part of the average household's rubbish. But the small boys had discovered that some of the rubbish boxes contained treasures — and that some of them bared the hidden secrets of souls. Delving under a top layer of tin cans, they often came on bottles which told of secret sins or even of secret illnesses. The Seymour boys had a certain distaste for medicine bottles, but quart or liter whisky, gin and wine bottles seemed to them just the thing desired for root beer, with a few pint bottles for occasions when only two or three were gathered together.

'You can always open two quarts when the whole family wants root beer at the same time,' Hank sagely pointed out, 'while a pint is plenty when somebody you don't like drops in. Let's get mostly quarts.'

John had a big wagon. As the Seymours had no car and lived quite a distance from the town's little business district, he and Chuck often used the wagon for cash and carry purchases. A hundred pounds of flour and quite a lot of groceries could be put in that wagon, and the two boys could pull it without dif-

ficulty. The next day all four boys went forth on a bottle hunt, and came home with a wagon load of evidence on the private lives of many Ourville citizens.

The next day Mom and Dad went to the city. Dad had sold another story, and they put in a full day buying things the family needed. Now that the children were bigger, they could stay out all day, including evening, for the boys were clever at camp cooking. That evening was one of the rare evenings when they did not hurry home. There was a show in the city they felt they really should see.

It was midnight when they got home, and all was still. The house was in better order than it often was when they had spent the evening at home. It seemed that the youngsters, placed on their honor and responsibility, had done their best to keep things in order. In the kitchen there were signs that the linoleum had been mopped, though around the edges there was a crunching underfoot which suggested sugar. On the sink were two dishpans, a number of corks, and two bags which had contained raisins. The Seymours always bought raisins in four-pound packages.

'The boys have been making their root beer,' detected Mom. 'And they've cleaned up pretty well, haven't they, the dears?'

'They seem to have cleaned up quite a lot of raisins,' agreed Dad.

Mom glanced into the sugar bin.

'Yes,' she said, 'and they've cleaned up a lot of sugar, too. Why, they've used up nearly all there was!'

'Maybe they made candy or something,' said Dad. 'They couldn't have used eight pounds of raisins in

their root beer bottles. Putting only two or three to a bottle, a single pound would have been more than enough.'

As they went upstairs, Hank, on guard though in his bed, called:

'Hi!'

'Hello, dear,' said Mom. 'How did everything get along?'

'Oh, swell.'

'I see you made the root beer.'

'Yep. Forty-two bottles of it.'

'You must have made several dishpans full.'

'Oh, the dishpan wasn't big enough. We used the bathtub.'

'Even at that,' said Dad, 'you seem to have used an awful lot of sugar.'

'Well... maybe we did make it a little sweet. We thought that would make it better.'

'And did you engage in a raisin-eating contest?' demanded Dad.

'Naw. We just put some in the bottles.'

'But you used eight pounds. And I told you to put only a couple of raisins in a bottle.'

'We didn't remember that. We thought you said "some" raisins, so we didn't count 'em. We just threw a little handful in each bottle.'

'Well, I guess that will be all right,' said Mom.

'I hope so,' said Dad. 'But a lot of sugar and a lot of raisins may steam up the fermentation quite a bit.'

'Well, you must go to sleep now, dear,' said Mom. But Dad had taken a look into the bathroom, and was suppressing a grin. He had learned to shy away from bathtub-made beverages back in the days of prohibition.

'It must have been a big job filling all those bottles,' he suggested. 'How did you do it, Hank?'

'Oh, it wasn't hard,' said Hank. 'We just siphoned the beer into 'em — with the enema tube.'

Mom had learned to budget herself rigidly, but never had been able to establish a sinking fund. Before going to town with Dad, she had looked over her larder and decided that she could afford to spend a few dollars of her household money because she had sugar and raisins and butter and eggs enough to last the week out. But the boys had used such astonishing amounts of all those things that her budget was upset. The children all liked oatmeal for breakfast, if a handful of raisins was scattered over it, but lack of raisins made appetite die away. They could use up eggs and butter and general supplies with the voraciousness of a steam shovel. And of course Mom had spent more in the city than she had intended to. So the next few weeks had to be weeks of extreme economy in the Seymour house.

Sylvia had several little girl friends who often came to see her, partly because she had brothers whom they pretended not to like. Glendon Allvine, associate producer in a motion-picture studio, was an old friend of Dad's, and had once sent Sylvia a lovely toy tea set, so that she was able to serve her guests stylishly if not well. Mom usually supplied chocolate milk or orange juice for such 'tea parties,' but just then she felt she couldn't afford those things — for besides the girl visitors, the boys always came in for the refreshments, too. One afternoon while she was feeling poorest three girls dropped in, and Sylvia sought her mother for a whispered conference.

'Can we have some chocolate milk?' she asked.

'I'm sorry, dear, but it's all gone.'

'Chisel! And the oranges are all gone, too. What have we got, mother?'

Mom studied the problem a moment. Then her face brightened in a way she hoped would be infectious.

'I'll tell you,' she cried gaily. 'We'll serve something quite new. We'll use a bottle of the boys' root beer.'

'Oh, I don't think we'll like beer,' said Sylvia.

'But this is quite a different kind of beer, darling. Don't you know how often the boys buy it when they are at soda fountains?'

There was nothing else in the cupboard, so a bottle of the root beer was selected. When the cork was pulled there was a report a passer in the street could have heard. When the beer was poured into Sylvia's little teacups everyone of them was crowned with beautiful, creamy foam which delighted the eyes of her guests. They thought it was going to be something like ice cream soda. When they tasted it, they didn't like it very much, but they had to be polite.

Several times after that root beer saved the day at Sylvia's tea parties.

Their work together on the P.-T.A. had made good friends of Mom and Mrs. Gale. While Mom was feeling very poor, and worrying a bit over the outlook, Mrs. Gale helped her by telling her how badly she looked.

'You're all worn out,' she said. 'You should take a rest.'

'How can I take a rest?' demanded Mom.

'Oh, just take one. Go to the beach or Catalina or some quiet place up in the mountains for a week — just you and your husband. Hank is almost a man, and the other three boys have camped out in the mountains by themselves. I'll keep an eye on them. It won't be any trouble, for I'll only have to drop in twice a day. They can get their own breakfast, and I'll come over and see that they get the right sort of luncheons and dinners.'

It was a touching gesture. Mom realized that Mrs. Gale might as easily have said, 'I'll send my maid over,' but that would have put it on a different footing. Mom appreciated tact.

'I'll just hold you to that one of these days,' she threatened.

'You should do it right now,' declared Mrs. Gale.

When Mom told Dad about that offer, she added:

'Of course we can't think of anything like that now. But wasn't it kind?'

'Surely was,' said Dad. 'And we *can* think of it. Maybe something will turn up, Mrs. Micawber.'

Three days later something did turn up. Dad sold another story, the second in two weeks. It was one which had been rejected twenty-three times and he had given up hope of selling it; but because he liked it himself, and was Scotch and dogged, he had kept on sending it out. It was as if the hundred and fifty dollars it brought had been dropped by a wind from Heaven.

'By golly!' cried Dad, when he waved the check before Mom. 'We'll take up Sister Gale on that offer of hers, and go to Catalina for a week. It won't really be hard on her. All she'll have to do will be to look out for Sylvia a bit.'

Mom called up Mrs. Gale. Mrs. Gale was delighted to hear the news.

'Go right ahead, my dear, and don't worry about a thing,' she urged. 'If I were you I'd go tomorrow.'

'By George!' declared Dad. 'We *will* go tomorrow.'

They went away joyously. Mrs. Gale was there to see them off. Hank and Chuck almost fought over the right to carry out the bags. All the children promised to be good and careful. Mom and Dad assured one another frequently that the children were going to enjoy the vacation as much as they would, and they had not a thing to worry about.

But the day after they had left, Mrs. Gale caught such a bad cold that the doctor called it flu and ordered her to bed.

As has been revealed before, the Gales were close neighbors to Mrs. Morgan Waltham Willis and her son Edward. With all her broad-mindedness — of which she often spoke, but which no one else ever noticed — Mrs. Willis had never been able to approve of the Seymours. She looked on the boys as ruffians, and felt sure that the parents who were responsible for them must be persons of sadly deficient character. Mrs. Willis stood for all that was most moral in Ourville. She was president of the local branch of the Anti-Alcoholic Sisterhood and chairman of the board of the Anti-Cigarette League.

But when Mrs. Gale told of her predicament Mrs. Willis showed herself to be a woman of broad, generous, and charitable instincts.

'Why, my dear,' she said, 'don't you worry about those Seymour brats a minute. I will be happy to substitute for you in looking after them for a few days.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Gale, 'I would hardly think it right to accept an obligation and then shunt it off on someone else like that.'

'You shouldn't, my dear,' said Mrs. Willis, reprovingly. 'It is simply an act of Christian kindness, and I hope you feel sure I will find real pleasure in doing it.'

Mrs. Willis might have added that she always had wished to get a look at the inside of that Seymour shack. While she had never had any proof that it was a den of iniquity, she had always had her suspicions.

The result was that Mrs. Gale went to the Seymour house accompanied by Mrs. Willis, and announced to the children the change in arrangements, due to the great kindness of Mrs. Willis.

'We can get on all by ourselves,' said Chuck.

'But you'll let me come in every noon and every evening to see that everything is all right, won't you?' said Mrs. Willis, in her sweetest voice.

'Oh, sure,' said Chuck.

Mrs. Willis really did enjoy her first two visits to the Seymour house. She felt that she was showing herself in her most Christian light, and she always enjoyed appearing in her most Christian light. And she found a number of conditions which made her feel superior, which is comforting to almost any woman. There were always towels on the floor in the bathroom, which was proof that the children hadn't been well reared. The appellations by which they called one another showed there was a low and ruffianly streak in the boys, which Mrs. Willis always had suspected. They usually addressed one another

as 'Nitwit,' 'Dumb Nut,' 'Dumb Cluck,' or 'Gargoyle.' They tilted back on their chairs at table and sometimes quarreled vociferously, and did numerous other things no properly reared children would do. Of course, one couldn't blame the children for it, but it plainly showed Mrs. Willis that, as she had suspected, the parents of the Seymour children weren't and never had been the right kind of people.

But the children treated her with tolerant respect, and showed sincere and outspoken admiration for her desserts. They did all the dish-washing, and even Mrs. Willis had to admit they did a quite respectable job of it. They also made their beds, straightened up their rooms, and used the vacuum cleaner pretty well. The vacuum cleaner was such a new toy in the house that it was interesting. They had never had a vacuum cleaner until Dad sold a novelette for more than he expected to, and that had been only about six weeks before.

Perhaps the only real disappointment to Mrs. Willis lay in the fact that she found no evidences of real depravity. There might be much she would feel it her duty to criticize at a later date, but no signs of sin. Of course, there was no telling what was hidden away in Gregory Seymour's office, which was locked, and it wasn't feasible to investigate the bedroom closets as she would have liked to. But, except for a couple of pipes and a tobacco jar on the mantel, she could find nothing absolutely wrong.

But she was thrillingly shocked the next afternoon, when Sylvia had several little girl friends in for a tea party.

To Sylvia, root beer was beer. She had heard of

other kinds of beer, just as she had heard of several brands of butter. To her they were all just beer or all just butter.

Sylvia's guests included Lois, who was only five, and Ida Mae, who was seven. They were sweet and innocent little things, so Mrs. Willis was horrified to hear Sylvia say:

'We can't have any chocolate milk or orange juice today, but we can have all the beer we want.'

Ida Mae made a wry face.

'I don't like beer,' she said. 'Once Daddy gave me a sip of some and it tasted bitter.'

'Oh, it isn't bad when you get used to it,' urged Sylvia, with the eagerness of one who has something to sell. 'I didn't like it a bit at first, but Mother made us drink it, and now I like it so much I want it every day.'

Mrs. Morgan Waltham Willis, president of the Ourville branch of the Anti-Alcoholic Sisterhood, raised protesting hands to Heaven. Some sixth sense had told her that the Seymours were wicked and loose-lived people, but she had never dreamed of such depravity as this. The very idea of systematically teaching an eight-year-old girl to drink beer!

But she restrained herself. She would not speak until she knew all. With ears pricked like those of a Scottie pup, she listened. She had looked in every cupboard she thought might hide suspicious bottles but had seen none.

'Where is the beer, Sylvia?' asked Lois.

'Down cellar,' said Sylvia, cheerfully. 'There's lots and lots of it down cellar, and we can have all we want. Come on, let's get some.'

Mrs. Willis followed the little girls outdoors. The

cellar door was heavy, but a weight attached to it by means of a pulley made it easy to open, and Sylvia lifted it easily.

Eagerly down the steps went the three little girls and the large and imposing woman. And when the eyes of the latter accustomed themselves to the gloom of the cellar, she cried out in righteous indignation. There before her, it appeared, were all the hellish beverages she had ever heard of, and quite a few others.

There was an electric light in the cellar, and Sylvia switched it on. It flashed and glinted on bottles which shone like jewels — bottles labeled 'Whisky,' 'Gin,' 'Port,' 'Sherry,' and 'Rum' as well as 'Beer.'

'I wouldn't have believed it,' gasped Mrs. Willis, 'if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes.'

But Sylvia was excited and happy. She was showing something to her guests and trying to arouse their enthusiasm for it, or at least to interest them in it. She reached for a graceful champagne bottle and said:

'I like this kind of beer best.'

Mrs. Willis all but burst a blood vessel.

Mrs. Willis was tempted to get a hatchet and follow the example of that noble woman, Carrie Nation. But she knew what fearful liars all people who drink are. Her husband, who had vanished for parts unknown some years before, had occasionally indulged in drink, and at such times he always lied fluently. He had always claimed that he had taken only one drink, out of politeness, when she knew he must have taken at least half a dozen. He always spoke of 'one little drink' when his breath, his flushed face,

and his eyes convinced Mrs. Willis he had had ten big ones. Yes, strong drink made liars of all men, and she must get her proofs beyond all question. She snatched the champagne bottle from Sylvia's hands.

'Give me that, child,' she ordered. 'You girls mustn't think of drinking stuff like that.'

'But Mother and Daddy said we might,' protested Sylvia, who wasn't going to see her tea party spoiled without a struggle.

'Come out of the cellar instantly,' commanded Mrs. Willis. 'Come upstairs with me. We shall see.'

She shooed them out of the cellar, then followed and slammed the door down. She marched into the kitchen and got a corkscrew. Of course she had never tasted champagne, but she knew all about it from literature — from the literature circulated by the Anti-Alcoholic Sisterhood. She knew that when you pulled the cork there was a report like a pistol shot, and the beverage would come foaming out if one didn't begin to pour it very quickly. She knew that it tasted like a pleasant electric shock, sending a tingle all through one's veins. She was going to see, beyond all question, if that was champagne, and if it was —

She pulled the cork, and the beverage in the bottle met her more than halfway. The boys must have put at least two handfuls of raisins in that bottle, and they must have been generous with the yeast and other ingredients, too. The report when Mrs. Willis pulled the cork was so loud and convincing that her mouth popped open in an 'Ah' of triumph, and instantly a foaming geyser shot into that open mouth.

It stung. It tingled. It made her gasp — and swallow. It made her choke. It made her stagger!

Mrs. Willis knew from what she had read that the tingle of champagne was supposed to race through one's veins. So she knew the beverage she had swallowed was champagne. Even if the bottle hadn't said so, she thought, she would have known it. And gaspy dread seized her. What if she, Nan Waltham Willis, Ourville's foremost enemy of Demon Rum, were intoxicated? What if her breath smelled of liquor!

The fear made her stagger again. She always had thought of champagne as a poison in the same class with arsenic. Indeed, when carried away by fervor she thought of arsenic as something mild and helpful compared to intoxicating liquors. Arsenic, she knew, was often made into medicine.

She began to feel ill. She sank into a chair. It was a chair which had been pushed into a corner of the kitchen to wait until Dad could get around to mending it. The chair groaned and gave way under her. As it collapsed she bumped her head and lay sprawling, almost stunned, for a moment.

The girls ran to her in deep concern. They tried to pull her to her feet, but she only stared at them bewilderedly — befuddledly. She did not know it, but she still clutched the champagne bottle in her hands. She had no idea what a picture she presented. But she realized it when she heard exclamations of astonishment and horror. Absorbed in the good deed she was doing for the Seymours, little though they deserved it, she had forgotten that the Community Cleanup Committee of the Anti-Alcoholic Sisterhood was to meet at her house that afternoon. Two other

members of the committee, Sister Graney and Sister Cummings, had gone to the Willis home, and had been told they might find Mrs. Willis at the Seymour place. Getting no response to their knocks at the front door, and hearing voices in the rear, they had walked around there, and were peering into the kitchen from which the sounds proceeded.

Sister Willis dragged herself to a sitting posture. But she still was stunned and bewildered, and her head sagged. She could vaguely realize that two women she had counted among her friends were leaping to misjudgment of her as she so often had leaped to misjudgment of others, but she could not even stare at them just then. She could not, for the moment, even care.

Over at Catalina, Mom and Dad Seymour were beginning to find genuine relaxation. The first day they had kept wondering how the children were getting along, and hoping the task wouldn't be too hard on Mrs. Gale. Then they had gone out in a glass-bottomed boat and had been able to study sea gardens and sea life as they never had before, and later, taking a walk in the interior wilderness, they had come on two wild mountain goats engaged in a fierce battle. That night they shunned the ballroom and the casino, but went out to see the flying fish. All they had to do was hold up a light in their boat, and the fish would fly toward it like moths to a flame.

'The children are darlings,' said Mom, 'but it's wonderful to get clear away from them once in a while.'

'Surely is,' agreed Dad. 'And we needn't worry about anything. Mrs. Gale will look after the kids

so it will be as fine a vacation for them as for us. Grand woman, Mrs. Gale.'

'She's certainly a rare friend. I'll never forget this outing. It's the first utterly carefree trip for longer than a day that we've had in seventeen years! I can hardly believe we're to have a whole week of it.'

'Don't worry. We are. Now let's take the boat trip to the peninsula. They say there's an old Chinese junk up there that a motion-picture company is using as a set. Let's go watch 'em shoot a scene or two.'

'All right,' said Mom, reaching for her hat.

She laughed joyously, and Dad smiled. It was a new experience for both of them. They could just get up and go where they wished to go without stopping to check up on the children or make arrangements for dinner or even give instructions to a maid.

They were savoring the completeness of their vacation when a knock on the door interrupted them. Dad opened the door and confronted a page.

'Telegram for Mrs. Seymour,' said the boy.

'For me!' exclaimed Mom, who was taking a last look at her hat in the mirror. 'How odd!'

She tore open the envelope and stared at it. Then she stared uncomprehendingly at Dad. He took it from her and read:

Cannot remain in this house of sin. Return at once.

NAN WALTHAM WILLIS.

How had she got into their house of sin? Where was Mrs. Gale? What on earth had happened? They stared at one another like dumbfounded statues. They couldn't understand it. But when Mom could move she moved dazedly toward the closet.

'What are you going to do?' asked Dad.

'Pack. We can catch the evening mail plane to the mainland if we hurry.'

They were home in three hours. But still they could only guess at what had occurred. Mom called up Mrs. Willis, but the maid said Mrs. Willis was not at home. Sylvia was the only eye-witness of events leading up to the telegram. But from Sylvia's account they were able, in time, to reconstruct the scene. And when Dad realized what must have happened he sank into a chair, choking with laughter.

'I don't see anything funny,' said Mom bitterly. 'Vacation spoiled, reputation ruined, and all because one fool woman jumped to conclusions.'

'There are two compensations,' averred Dad, still grinning.

'What compensations?'

'Well, for one thing, we had a wonderful vacation while it lasted. The three days seemed like six to us. Then, by summoning us home Mrs. Willis has saved us at least seventy-five dollars.'

'Why, you old Scotchy!'

'You've been wanting a winter coat for years. You may put that money in the coat fund. Every time you wear the coat you can thank Mrs. Willis.'

'After all these years? Heaven bless the woman!... But what's the other compensation?'

'The comforting assurance,' said Dad, grimly, 'that sooner or later people who habitually jump to conclusions are bound to jump to their own.'

14—THE LESSON THAT CAROMED

HANK SEYMOUR was one of those boys who are 'too clever for any good use,' and therefore often worry their parents sick. At a very early age he developed the cleverness which got him out of jobs and trouble — and often got him into double jobs and trouble for punishment. He was a likable lad, but his parents had known men who never amounted to anything because they were too clever.

For that reason a fury born of fear seized on Dad every time Hank did anything tricky. He knew the boy had capabilities which would carry him far if he used them, but the habit of shirking was dangerous. So he tried, by lectures, stern commands, punishments, and fines to inspire Hank to live a far more upright life than he, Dad, had lived at Hank's age.

'I don't want any son of mine to grow up tricky,' he declared, 'and every time you do anything tricky you are going to lose part or all of your allowance for the week.'

'Okay, Popsickle,' said Hank reverently.

'And I want you to stop hitch-hiking,' continued Dad. 'Some day, as I've often told you before, you are going to be picked up by a drunk driver who will drive you into a terrible smash. You're a big boy now — big enough, I regret to say, to wear my clothes. So many hitch-hikers have robbed or mur-

dered those who were trying to be kind to them that it is getting so only the reckless people will pick up a man-sized hitch-hiker. The kind of driver most likely to give you a ride is the very kind most likely to get you into trouble.'

Hank nodded. He had heard that several times before. The best advice you can give a boy becomes the most boresome after he has heard it three or four times. Hank didn't say that in words, but politely stifled a pretended yawn.

It was opening day at the Los Angeles County Fair at Pomona, and Pomona was only forty miles away. Hank liked fairs, or shows of any kind, and he was determined to visit that one because he had heard Edward Willis boasting that he and his mother were going, and would have a box in the grandstand and tickets to all the concessions. He was determined that the next time he met Edward he was going to be able to tell more about the fair than Edward could.

He didn't wish to disobey Dad, but this situation with Edward was something Dad couldn't understand. He couldn't let that snooty little snob enjoy a triumph if he could help it.

But unexpected manna fell from Heaven on the morning of the opening day. The telephone rang. Ed Ainsworth of the Los Angeles *Star* was calling for Dad.

'I'm in a spot,' said Ainsworth. 'I had arranged to go to Pomona this morning and spend all day at the fair. But I've got the flu. Could you go over there and cover it for me? I can pay you forty cents an inch for the story. We can also use at least three pictures at three dollars apiece.'

That meant at least twenty-five dollars for his day's work, for the *Star* would use two full columns on the fair. By taking in enough territory to make a small State, Los Angeles County established the right to call itself the richest agricultural county in America, and its county fair is bigger than a good many State fairs. Indeed, it practically is a State fair for Southern California, supported by State appropriations, and nearly all the important exhibitors at the California State Fair at Sacramento count on exhibiting at the Los Angeles County Fair, too. It is the only county fair daily attended by hundreds of motion-picture personalities, drawn there by the races, and about it is an air of urbanity and sophistication not usual at county fairs in general. And children love it because its midway contains more queer, unreasonable, and mildly frightening 'amusements' than they can find at any of the beach amusement parks.

'How about passes for my family?' demanded Dad. 'You see, by the time I get someone to drive us there are eight in our crowd. There won't be much profit for me if I only have passes for two.'

'I'll phone over to Driscoll, the secretary,' said Ainsworth, 'and he'll give you special passes that will let the kiddies ride all the hair-raisers in the place. I can get you passes for everything except the restaurants and the bars.'

'We'll go,' said Dad.

It was a great day for the Seymours. Not only did they have special passes to all the amusements, but Mr. Driscoll's own box at the races. And between races there were circus acts! Dad felt it was all such a windfall that he could treat them to ice cream,

cold drinks, popcorn, peanuts, and candy bars. It was a field day for breaking all the rules of economy and health, and they could enjoy doing one don't after another.

But Hank was sustained by one secret satisfaction which none of the others guessed. He had heard Driscoll say:

'I'll make all these passes good for three days, in case you wish to come back tomorrow or the next day.'

When the long, hard day was over, and Mom and Dad didn't care if they never saw another fair, Hank artfully asked:

'Can I see your passes, Dad — to see if they're just like mine?'

'“May I see,”' corrected Dad, as he handed them over.

Hank studied them. Then he asked:

'Can I — may I — see that letter he gave you to the midway show people?'

Dad handed him the letter, and thought no more about it. Passes and letters which had served their purpose ceased to interest him.

Hank was up early next morning, and dressed with care. When breakfast-time arrived he had vanished, and he did not reappear until after midnight. Then his jaunty whistle was heard afar off. When Hank knew he was out late enough to merit stern reproof he always announced his return from half a block away by whistling. He didn't know just why, and neither did his parents, but he always did it. And psychologically it was a good idea. Often the sound of that whistle relieved the anxiety of worrying

parents. Sometimes it aroused annoyance at him for waking the neighbors which supplanted indignation at him for being out too late. Or it gave that indignation time to burst forth and cool a little before he finally came up the stairs and got in reach of it.

No matter what his inward trepidation, he came up those stairs cheery, jaunty, and assured.

'Come here!' called Mom sternly, as he reached the top of the stairs that night.

He came, with a swagger.

'Boy, did I have fun!' he exclaimed.

'Where have you been?'

'Why, to the county fair.'

'How did you get in?'

'Those passes we had yesterday. They were good for three days.'

'Ha!' snapped Dad. 'I suppose that was why you wished to see that letter yesterday?'

'Well, yes.'

'You used the letter too, did you?'

'Sure.'

'And did you get in to the races?'

'I sure did. Mr. Driscoll had given us an order for eight seats, and I thought it was a shame not to use it.'

'My word,' snorted Dad, 'I should think you would have got all of the fair that any normal human being could wish yesterday. You don't care anything about the cows and chickens, and you saw all the midway stuff and circus stuff yesterday.'

But mothers are always mothers. In her heart, Mom was much more worried about how her boy had fared than about what he had done or where he had been.

'You left before breakfast,' she reminded him accusingly. 'Did you have anything to eat all day?'

'Oh, sure. I ate swell.'

'I hope, son,' said Dad with concern in his voice, 'that you haven't been begging or bumming ——'

'Oh, no, I had plenty of money.'

'Where did you get it?'

'Why, you see,' said Hank. 'I had passes for eight people, and there's only one of me. The general admission is fifty cents, and the good grandstand seats cost seventy-five. It was easy to line up seven guys outside the general admission gate and take 'em in for a quarter apiece. That was a dollar seventy-five right there. And it wasn't hard to get five horse-racey men at fifty cents a head to go with me in the grandstand.'

There wasn't anything one could do about such an incident. Dad felt he owed Driscoll an apology, but the chances were a hundred to one that Driscoll wouldn't ever know anything about it. It wasn't quite fair, but one could hardly expect a boy to think about that. And he had given the fair such a good story in the *Star* that Driscoll wasn't going to mind what was done with the passes. The thing was to confiscate the passes now, and to grow stern about something he had a full right to grow stern about.

'Son,' Dad demanded, 'how did you get to the fair?'

'Oh, I hitch-hiked.'

'Haven't I warned you repeatedly against hitch-hiking?'

'Yes.'

'Young man, this is a final warning. If you hitch-

hike again, with anyone you do not know, I will fine you your entire week's allowance. You understand?'

'Yes.'

'All right. And remember there's a big circus coming to town Saturday. Now get to bed, quickly.'

Hank went to bed, but did not long remain in bed. He had spent most of four dollars and a quarter on food and soft drinks, and uneasy lies the tummy which wears the crown of thorns any thoughtless youth with that much money to spend will put on it. Mom and Dad had put in a day of mild worry over Hank's absence, an evening of growing worry over his continued absence, and soon found that they were in for a night of anxiety because of his physical condition. It was four in the morning before he was sleeping peacefully and Mom and Dad could stop listening anxiously. Then they tried to go to sleep, but couldn't. At six o'clock they got up and busied themselves with their day's work — while Hank slept peacefully all day. At noon he roused long enough to eat the dainty luncheon Mom carried up to him on a tray, and bellow for more. At four in the afternoon he came downstairs, dressed, and got her to cook him a special meal. Then he announced that he was going out for a walk.

There were plenty of chores to do in the yard. He could have enjoyed muscle-limbering exercises without walking off the place. But he chose a moment when Mom was thinking of something else to announce that he was going for a walk, and he was out of earshot before she realized that he might just as well be catching up on duties he had neglected the day before.

Hank knew there were chores he should be doing. But he could be very firm with himself at times. He refused to let himself think of them. He wouldn't let himself remember them until he was out of the sight of any other member of the family who might call attention to them. He would have enjoyed work which stretched and relaxed his muscles, and accomplished something, much more than an aimless ramble. But around the corner there might be adventure. A walk was just a walk, a kind of work in itself, but the corner held possibilities. Around the corner he might find romance.

And instinct served him well. Hardly had he got around the corner when adventure rolled up to him. A sport model motor car of most expensive make came weaving toward him. In a car like that, he knew, it would be easy to go ninety m.p.h. His eyes danced with appreciation of that car, and he raised a hand in salute to the man at the wheel.

The man stopped the car. He didn't seem to be going anywhere. He seemed to be steering as aimless a course as Hank was.

'Hi, kid,' he said. 'Want a ride?'

Hank did not get home to dinner. At nine o'clock nothing had been heard from him. Dad phoned the drugstore to see if anyone there had seen him, and was told that Hank had been seen whizzing out of town in the car of a stranger.

They resolutely tried to forget about Hank. Dad handed Mom the evening paper. The first headline to catch her eyes announced a kidnaping in Seattle. Mom could feel her hair turning gray.

'But, my dear,' said Dad, 'kidnapers go after the

children of people who have money. Everybody knows we have a hard time keeping our children fed and partly clothed, and couldn't raise more than two or three thousand dollars if we sold everything we possess. No kidnaper is going to risk death or terrible punishment for so little.'

'But he's a nice-looking boy,' worried Mom, 'and they might have picked him up by mistake, thinking he was someone else.'

'Mistake!' snorted Dad. 'Heaven pity the poor kidnaper gang that gets Hank. He'll eat 'em out of house and home, and worry them into early graves. It would certainly be a mistake for any kidnaper to get that kid.'

Dad spoke crossly, because he, too, was worried. There were so many automobile accidents, and probably there was nothing in Hank's pockets which would identify him. Usually Hank was good for at least three days after some dereliction had brought a severe reprimand, so this absence was hard to understand. The fair passes had been taken from him, he had no money, he had seemed repentant.

When ten o'clock came Dad said positively:

'We must go to bed, my dear. We got practically no sleep last night and we're so tired things look a lot gloomier to us than they are.'

'I wish you'd telephone the police or the emergency hospitals in two or three near-by towns, to see if there have been any accidents,' said Mom.

'Nonsense!' said Dad — who had been on the point of doing that same thing fifty times already. 'That kid bears a charmed life. He never makes any trouble for himself — it's always we other people who suffer because of him.'

'You know that isn't so. He's always getting into some kind of grief or punishment, at school or at home.'

'Oh, all right,' said Dad disgustedly, but secretly a little glad to be forced to yield. 'I'll call up a few places if we don't hear from him in another half hour.'

No matter how worried people are, they shrink from running the risk of appearing silly. Hank might have gone to the home of some boy friend within half a mile of their home. No one had ever been better at forgetting time than Hank was, and he might be having a delightful time there. Ever since Hank was six years old Dad had been calling up the little Ourville office of the law to see if a lost child had been reported there, and Deputy Sheriff Braymer had got so he chuckled every time Dad reported that he and Mom were worried about Hank's absence. He knew that even if he asked Braymer to send out a radio call for Hank he wouldn't do it immediately, for Hank always had a way of turning up smiling. He wouldn't do that until other possibilities were exhausted. But he would call up a few receiving hospitals. It would at least be comforting to know that Hank *wasn't* in them.

But that hope of reassurance was poorly founded. The first emergency hospital called reported in such a way as to treble their anxiety:

'Well, maybe he's here, and maybe not,' was the reply. 'There's a boy about that age here, but we haven't been able to identify him yet, and he's — well, he's not able to speak for himself.'

That put them in a quandary. Their first impulse was to hire a car and dash over to see that boy.

'But it may not be our boy at all,' said Dad, 'and we'd get back to find Hank safe in bed.'

'I'd go in a second if I thought it would work that way,' said Mom, fervently.

'Let's do a little more phoning first,' said Dad. 'Maybe we can decide where to go by elimination.'

He called another emergency hospital and got this report:

'There's a young man here who looks a bit older than sixteen, but he has the light hair and blue eyes, all right, and is slender and about the right height... We're just getting ready to send him over to the morgue to await identification.'

Dad didn't tell Mom all of that message. He just looked around as if annoyed.

'Confound it,' he said. 'I guess there's no way except to go and see. Every town seems to have a young man or two suffering from automobile accidents.'

'But you gave the name.'

'Surely. But over here there's a boy they say is about twenty. Of course, to some people, taking a hasty look, Hank might seem about twenty. He's taller than I am.'

But Dad was being too provoked, too nonchalant. Mom knew he had heard something which had alarmed him.

'I'll go with you,' she said, 'if — if you have any reason to think something serious has happened.'

'But, my dear, hadn't you better stay here with the children?'

'Not if you have reason to think something serious —'

And then they heard Hank's cheery, slightly off-key, reassuring, and ice-breaking whistle. Their smiles broke through the clouds. They beamed congratulation on one another. They listened joyously until the steps came up the porch, and they heard Hank greet the dogs, that had recognized him so soon that they hadn't barked once.

Then indignation and offended parenthood returned to them. They resumed their injured looks. They grew stern and determined as Hank came up the stairs.

'Come in here, young man,' ordered Dad.

'Where have you been?' demanded Mom, in a voice like a spear of ice.

'Who, me?' said Hank innocently.

That always infuriating time-saver made Dad snap:

'Don't try to beat around the bush. What have you been doing and where have you been?'

Hank grinned in complete surrender.

'Well, Dad,' said Hank, 'what you always told me would happen did happen today. A drunk driver picked me up — and I couldn't get home any sooner.'

'Were you in an accident?' demanded Dad.

'Were you hurt?' asked Mom, again all worry.

Hank's dramatic announcement had wakened Sylvia, whose bedroom door was open. She had heard many warnings of what might happen.

'Oh, Henry,' she called, 'were you killed?'

'No,' said Hank. 'It wasn't quite that bad. The man just couldn't drive straight. He hadn't any more than picked me up when he wobbled so we nearly met a truck coming head-on at about sixty. Boy, was I scared!'

Mom shuddered. But Dad was growing more and

more annoyed as his study of Hank failed to reveal anything physical to worry about.

'But you didn't have sense enough to get out right then?' he accused.

'Yes, I had sense enough to get out,' said Hank. 'But under the circumstances, I couldn't.'

'Wouldn't he let you out?'

'Well, after that truck whizzed past, just barely missing us, the man drove to the side of the road and stopped. "Kid," he said, "can you drive?"'

"A little bit," I said.

"Well," he said, "that's more than I can. Take the wheel and take me home."'

'But you can't drive,' snapped Dad.

'Oh, yes, I can. I know lots of kids that have cars, and some of 'em have let me learn in their cars. But mostly they'd only let me have the wheel a minute or two. Today was the finest practice I ever got.'

'It must have been. You've been gone about eight hours. You don't mean to say you drove the man around and around?'

'Oh, no. But he lived out in San Bernardino, and that's a good sixty miles. We had to drive out Foot-hill Boulevard, so we had all kinds of traffic to buck. Gee, it was a grand experience for me, Pop.'

'And plenty of worry for us,' snapped Dad. 'No doubt you never thought of that.'

But Mom still was anxious.

'You didn't have any accidents at all?' she asked.

'Sure not. But I drove carefully. I never once went over fifty, and never went that fast except when we were out where the highway is mighty broad and fine.'

'Did you get him there safely?' Dad still was very stern, but was beginning to feel inwardly proud.

'Sure did.'

'How did you get home?'

'Oh, the man said if I'd drive him home he'd pay my carfare back to Los Angeles, and my bus fare out from there.'

'So that's what happened, eh? You drove him all the way home ——'

'Clear into his own garage.'

'And you've been all the time since then getting back?'

'That's it, Pop. But probably I saved that man's life. And maybe I saved the lives of others he would have run into. Don't you think I've done my good deed for today?'

'Maybe you have,' admitted Dad, still firmly, 'but I have told you time and again that you must not hitch-hike. Only today I warned you that if you did it again you would be punished severely. After worrying your mother almost sick last night, you willfully go off and complete the job tonight. I'm sorry to do it, son, but I must be a man of my word. I shall have to deprive you of your entire week's allowance Saturday. I was going to give you a whole dollar because of the circus. But now I won't give you a cent — not a single cent. I hate to do it, but I must do something to impress your mind.'

Mom shuddered a little. She was ready to say, out loud, that Dad was right. But she didn't see how he could be quite as cruel as that. She feared it would be a heart-breaking blow to Hank. She felt secretly that Dad was carrying it a bit too far. He had said to her only a day or two before that Hank always managed to wriggle out of punishments, always got the best of the situation somehow, and they must find a way

to make things stick. Now Dad was making it stick in a big way.

But Hank seemed to realize that Dad was quite right. He nodded his head in a sort of approval. Maybe at last conscience was waking in that boy.

'That's all right, Dad,' said Hank. 'I guess you're right to hold up my allowance... Besides, I really don't need it. You see, this San Berdu guy gave me five bucks for driving him all the way home, and as I hitch-hiked back from there I've still got all of it, except two dimes I spent for giant malts.'

I 5—THE GREAT OURVILLE DERBY

IT WAS the habit of Pete, the Scottie, to trot sedately forward as soon as the boys burst out of the house in the morning, stop squarely in front of the person he wished to greet, and make obeisance by stretching as if intent on turning himself into a dachshund and yawning prodigiously, the yawn ending in what, in a less dignified animal, might have been called a whimper. As there was no whimper about Pete it must have been Scottie for 'Hello,' uttered with a sort of blasé nonchalance. Pete wasn't given to effusiveness. But that greeting always made the children get down on their knees to fondle the little dog, and impelled anyone else to stoop and pet him.

One morning as Chuck bounded out Pete failed to arise and greet him. The little dog seemed very lazy. He was lying on the grass, and did not arise, stretch, and yawn. What becomes established ritual is more noticed when it is neglected than when it is observed. Chuck had started to dash past Pete with no more than a word over his shoulder, but when Pete's only response to his appearance was a twist of the part of him which would have wagged a tail had he had one, and a little querulous grunt, Chuck stopped suddenly and went down on the grass beside him.

'Why, Petey,' he baby-talked, 'wassamatter with you, boy?'

Pete only looked at him with mournful, puzzled eyes. Chuck gathered him into his arms and hurried indoors with him.

'Hey, Mom — Dad!' he called. 'Pete's sick.'

Mom took the little dog into her lap. The children gathered about, the three younger ones kneeling on the floor, all attempting to arouse the little fellow's interest. But Pete only looked miserably from one to another, and appealingly at Mom and Dad.

'Looks like poison,' said Dad.

'But why should anybody poison Pete?' asked Mom. 'He never alarms anyone or disturbs anyone.'

The dread word 'poison' had reached the children. They redoubled their efforts to coax and fondle Pete back to his old, gay, cocksure self. John seemed to think that by calling him Peetie-weetie-weetie in a voice that cooed like a dove's he could overcome the effects of poison. But Dad strode into the next room, and they heard him telephone the veterinarian to come at once.

Pete probably had been poisoned many hours before Chuck found him, and he died before the veterinarian could get there.

The children had never seen death before. The mystery of it awed them. At one moment Pete had looked at them with eyes reflecting suffering, hope, gratitude, understanding. Then suddenly he had gone into a sleep which was not a sleep, in which there seemed to be no suffering and no understanding, no fear and no hope. Instead of wishing to fondle him now they drew away in a sort of terror. But when they realized they could never fondle him again their eyes filled with tears, and Sylvia began to sob openly.

They found some solace in burying him in state, out under the jacaranda tree. But gloom hung over the house all morning. Dad went to his workroom and tried to work, but couldn't settle down to anything. It was so hard to understand why anyone should wish to poison Pete. Everyone smiled at mere sight of the little dog. Pete with ears like exclamation points, Pete rampant — dancing on his hind legs in excitement when menaced by some bigger dog — or merely Pete yawning his greeting, had been enough to make anybody smile. No one was afraid of Pete, and he hadn't barked at night. Of course he had had a few love affairs, for, after all, he was only human, but certainly no one with a healthy mind and a decent heart could have put poison where such a dog could get it.

Dad couldn't think of anything else, and so he had to write about it. He wrote an essay on the poisoning of Pete and mailed it to the *Los Angeles Star*. Two days later it appeared, signed, on the editorial page. And that afternoon the *Star* called Dad by telephone.

'About twenty people have called up to give you dogs, to take the place of Pete,' said Ainsworth. 'And quite a number of them asked your address. You'd better prepare for a dog shower.'

Then long distance calls began to come at frequent intervals — from people who wished to give the Seymours dogs. But Dad firmly refused them. Another dog would only mean another sad parting later on. Old Brownie still was living, but few dogs lived to be as old as Brownie, and very soon he would be going, too. No, positively no, they couldn't accept another dog.

Next morning the station agent called up.

'We've got a large package, express, for you,' he said.

'Hooray!' exclaimed Dad. 'Is somebody sending us a crate of oranges? We can use 'em.'

'N-no,' said the agent. 'I don't think it's oranges this time. I think it's intended as a pleasant surprise. The charges are prepaid. Shall I have the truck bring it right up?'

'Please do.'

Once in a while Bedford Jones, who owned a date ranch on the desert, sent them a box of dates. Once Dad had written a Sunday newspaper story about Sniff's Gardens, near Indio, and Sniff had shown his appreciation by sending them a crate of grapefruit, and their good friend Scott O'Dell had an orange ranch at Pomona. So presents weren't unknown in the Seymour household, but were rare enough to create excitement. The whole family was more than interested when Dad announced:

'Some present for us at the station.'

'What is it?'

'Surprise.'

'What do you suppose it can be?'

'They're sending it right up. We'll know soon.'

As soon as the truck was heard outside the children burst out the door.

Mom and Dad were almost as interested, but had more restraint. They took their time, just to show how grown up they were. When they reached the porch they heard Frank shrill:

'Oh, what a beaut! It's mine!'

'Yours, heck! rasped John. 'It ought to be mine.'

'No, sir!' stoutly asserted Chuck. 'Pete was mine, and I lost him, so I'm the one that ought to have somethin' to make up for him.'

'It's for all of us,' declared Hank. 'It isn't anybody's private property.'

'What can it be?' asked Mom.

Dad shook his head, and they hurried out. The boys had formed a ring about a big crate, and they could not see what was in the crate until they bent over the ring. The boys were opening the crate, without waiting to bring it in.

As Mom bent forward a long white muzzle thrust out of the opening the boys had made, and a long red tongue licked her face.

'Great grief!' ejaculated Dad. 'It's a dog!'

'A pure white collie!' cried Frank. 'I never seen one before.'

'Saw one, Frank.'

'Okay, I never sawed one.'

Hank and Chuck ripped the crate wider open, and the dog squeezed out and into Frank's arms. It was a young thing and happy to be petted again, instead of tossed about in a crate by strangers who had no time to get friendly. It was as appealingly friendly as only a lost dog, trying to win a new master, can be. And so their resolutions against the acquiring of another dog vanished and left no trace. In one minute the unwelcome newcomer had made herself a member of the family.

They named her Blanca, which is Spanish for white, and therefore as good a name as Blanche.

Blanca was only a few months old, and so thin that she was almost gaunt. But when a covey of quail in the canyon excited her she would run so fast that she became only a white streak on the landscape. The boys were sure she was faster than any other liv-

ing thing in the town, but kept that belief a secret. Her speed might come in handy some day.

It was summer when they got Blanca, and her lean body filled out so rapidly that when spring came she was a big, strong dog.

Then it was that Ourville, like nearly all the rest of America, became excited about the Kentucky Derby. Down at the liquor store they were making a book on the Derby, and even when the St. Catherine's Guild met the members couldn't talk of anything else, and made up a ten-cent pool among themselves, the winner to give all to the church. Horses they had seen and known at Santa Anita were in the race, and they felt a keen personal interest in it. When the race was broadcast, nearly every radio in the town was bringing it to a group of eager listeners.

Edward Willis was in one of those groups. A month before Edward had seen a shepherd dog pulling a cart, and had made his mother buy the outfit for him. His example had inspired Slick Gilkey to take the wheels from a baby buggy for which his family never again expected to have any use, build a light wagon box on them, and hitch up his dog, Melting Pot. After that it wasn't safe to leave any small-wheeled vehicle where it couldn't be watched. Some boy was too likely to 'find' it and make a dog car of it.

The spread of a fad among boys is even more astounding than the spread of a fashion among women. When kites are the thing you can hardly force boys to play marbles. They will fly kites with an all-absorbing devotion, as if bent on making a lifetime study of them. Then suddenly they will take up tops, discarding their kites as completely and ruthlessly as if

they had never cared for them at all. They can't think of anything but tops, even in school or in church. They will risk punishments by spinning tops on the living-room hearth or the dining-room table. They will engage in arguments which compel them to leap up from the breakfast table to demonstrate certain top 'pegging' on the hardwood floor. Yet when the mysterious edict goes about that marbles have succeeded tops the unsubmerged tenth of America's male population — those who have grown old enough to outwit or escape mothers and teachers but have not yet been made docile by the tender passion — hide away or throw away tops in the twinkling of an eye.

It was the first time Edward Willis had ever started a fad, and he felt the thrill of leadership.

'Hey, guys!' he shouted to the group of listening boys in front of the Ourville Hardware Company, which sold radios and had obligingly placed one in its doorway for the benefit of passers, 'we ought to have a Derby of our own — a dog Derby.'

A week earlier or a week later the idea would have fallen on hard and stony ground. It is the one who seizes the right moment who starts things in this world. The moment was completely right. And Fred Hull of the hardware company — which had sold the cart-builders a good many items for their carts — exclaimed:

'I'll give a five-dollar prize for the winner.'

The excitement of the Derby was in everyone's blood. The boys cheered, and exultantly laid plans. They would have the Ourville Derby on the next Saturday afternoon at three o'clock. They would make Mr. Hull supreme judge of the event.

'You'll have to start right on time if I'm the judge,' said Hull. 'I'm pretty busy Saturday afternoons.'

'We will,' they promised. 'We'll start right on the dot at three. We'll run two blocks down Grandview and then down to the schoolhouse. It won't take long, Mr. Hull.'

So that was arranged, and soon the boys of Ourville slipped away to their homes to prepare in secret for the great race.

The Seymour boys had a problem to face. Blanca had grown big and broad in the beam, but that did not interfere with her speed. Or, if it did, she had added power and had speed to spare. But Blanca was a young thing still, and timid. And their rivals in the race, unfortunately, knew it.

They took Blanca to the official course the day after they decided to enter her in the Ourville Derby. She was far from being trained to drive, but with Frank holding the lines and John out in front on his bicycle, calling and whistling to her, she made a bee-line for John as if she had been shot out of a mortar. There was no doubt in the minds of the boys that she could leave any dog in town behind, and their main fear was that she would leave her driver, and perhaps her cart, behind also. For instead of going around corners she was inclined to cut across them, and to leap the curbing instead of obeying the driver's urgings toward the roadway for vehicles.

But boys — even boys who can't be coaxed to work at anything else — will work tremendously hard at their play. With astonishing patience and effervescent ingenuity they strove to teach Blanca how much better it was to follow the straight and

narrow path which was to be the official course. John learned to set such a pace that Blanca could never catch him, but momentarily had the hope of doing so. Chuck and Hank learned to call such signals to John that he could ride without looking back.

And then Slick Gilkey appeared on the scene with his huge dog, Melting Pot. Trepidation almost choked the Seymours as the savage beast drew near, and Blanca tried to cuddle back against the cart she was pulling, seeking comfort and protection. But Melting Pot wasn't paying any attention to female dogs which had been altered, and all was well. Blanca, once she was reassured, showed a grateful desire to play with Melting Pot, but they were able to restrain her.

Melting Pot was hitched to a cart. The Seymours held Blanca back until Slick started to drive Melting Pot around the course. Not until they were sure Slick was making Melting Pot do his best did the Seymours start Blanca. But once John, on his bicycle, called and whistled to Blanca the speed of Melting Pot was as the speed of an oil truck compared to that of an airplane. Blanca loved to romp, and believed John was challenging her to catch him for a romp. She leaped forward so suddenly that had Frank not been braced for the jolt he would have rolled backward out of the cart. But Frank was braced, and in a moment Blanca was giving all the spies and clockers the thrill of their day.

Slick heard her gaining, and urged Melting Pot forward. Melting Pot responded with fierce determination. But he was simply outclassed. Blanca went past him like a white streak.

The Seymours cheered. But in a moment Hank,

observing the dark look on Slick's countenance, whispered:

'Golly! That was a mistake.'

'What do you mean, mistake?'

'We shouldn't of let anybody know how fast Blanca can run. They'll find some way to stop her.'

His brothers were unimpressed. After the superiority Blanca had just demonstrated they didn't believe anything could stop her.

'We must have some other trials and make her run slow,' continued Hank, who could speak English when he tried to but rarely tried in moments of excitement. 'It's the only way we can get any bets. ... Besides, if they know how fast Blanca can run you can bet some of 'em are gonna do somethin' dirty.'

They did their best to make the few spectators forget what they had seen. They managed other trials in which Blanca was not allowed to do her best. But they knew in their hearts that dark plots were being laid in the hope that they would hatch on the day of the Derby. They knew, because they saw Edward and Slick go into a huddle. They had been very careful not to let Blanca beat Edward's trained driving dog, Shep. They had pretended to be afraid to run such a young and unmanageable thing against Shep. They had lyingly tried to spread the idea that Blanca might get second or third if she could only be induced to run in the right direction.

In fact, no great figure in horse-racing, 'the sport of kings,' who was trying to surprise the public and the bookmakers could have descended to more trickery, deceit, and lying than did the Seymour boys.

But Edward and Slick and Snoopy Alkus held earnest secret confab, just after one of Blanca's specious public appearances. Then Snoopy took his leave with great unostentation, so marked that it could not fail to arouse suspicion. He left on Edward's bicycle, too. Edward had a combination lock on his bicycle and rarely let anyone use it.

'Where ya goin', Snoop?' demanded John, with candid accusation in his voice.

'Who, me? Aw, I gotta be goin'.'

'Hey, you guys,' called Edward. 'We all have to have a qualifying heat. There are going to be so many dog carts that the street won't hold 'em all. We better have a qualifying contest, and the six dogs which make the best showing will be in the Derby.'

'You can't make the rules for this Derby,' Chuck reminded him. 'That's up to Mr. Hull, who puts up the prize.'

'He'll agree to whatever suits the majority of us. All we need is a vote of all the contestants.'

'But they ain't all here.'

'That's where Snoopy's gone — to round 'em up. He'll see Mr. Hull and Mr. Skipperson, too, while he's at it.' Skipperson's Pharmacy had offered a three-dollar prize for second.

The Seymour boys were puzzled, but they knew the strategy of the rival camp was working. Of course Mr. Hull would agree that the contestants could make their own rules by majority vote. It looked to the boys like a scheme to disqualify Blanca. If they let her show what she could do the enemy would be informed. If they held her back too much she might not be one of the first six. It would be dangerous to let Blanca defeat Shep in a trial heat.

'The thing to do,' said Hank, 'is to run three trial heats, five dogs in each heat, the first two to qualify for the Derby. We got fifteen dogs entered, so that'll be just right. And we'll take 'em alphabetically.'

That was a master stroke, for Blanca would have to be in the first heat while Shep and Melting Pot would probably be in the last if they were called to the post alphabetically.

John, being the most guileless of manner of all the boys, was sent away on his bicycle to secure Mr. Hull's okay on that plan. Hull still was the supreme judge. When John returned he had it in writing:

I hereby authorize the running of three qualifying heats, five contestants in each heat, to select contestants for the Ourville Derby, the first two dogs in each heat to qualify. The contestants in each heat to be selected alphabetically.

(Signed) FRED P. HULL

P.S.: The five contestants in each heat may hold their contest at a time mutually agreeable. They need not all be held the same day.

When John returned triumphantly with that signed document from the donor of the purse, eleven of the fifteen dogs which were being groomed for the Derby were on hand, hitched up and ready to go. All of the dogs whose names placed them in the first heat were among those present.

'Let's have the first heat right now,' urged Frank, the official owner of Blanca.

'Oh, no!' cried Edward. 'Not yet.'

'Why not?'

'Well — let's wait a little while.'

'What for, when we're all here and ready?'

Edward looked eagerly in the direction of Snoopy's house.

'Snoopy ain't here — and Melting Pot isn't,' he argued.

'So what? Meltin' Pot ain't in this heat. Don't all you kids want to see some racin', right now?'

The ayes had it, though the nays vociferated with all their might. Edward and Slick first demanded, then pleaded, that nothing be done until Snoopy returned. But Snoopy had small standing in that community. They couldn't advance any good reason for waiting until Snoopy returned.

Boys are impatient creatures. It was plain that Edward and Slick were trying to delay matters, but the other boys were excited, and would not be delayed. Almost immediately the five dogs drawn for the first heat were ranged in line for the start. And John and Chuck Seymour drifted away toward the finish line, John stopping when only half a block away and Chuck at about the three-quarters pole — or where it would have been had there been a three-quarters pole.

Blanca still was so unbroken to driving that she would have climbed into any inviting lap, cart and all, or romp with anyone who wished a romp. But with Hank holding her head and Frank holding the reins she kept fairly still.

Bob Thomas, the official starter, had a real pistol. He waved it importantly.

'All ready!' he shouted.

'Ready!' shrilled the drivers.

But Blanca didn't know what a pistol was. It looked like a threatening stick to her. She tried to lie

down and roll on her back, lifting her feet in gestures, half coaxing, half prayerful.

'Wait! Wait!' shouted Frank.

'Aw, you said all ready a second ago,' sneered Edward. 'We can't wait to train half-wit dogs.'

Hank lifted Blanca bodily and set her on her feet, while she licked his face in a most conciliatory manner.

'On your marks!' warned the official starter.

Drivers, spectators, and even the dogs — except Blanca — grew rigid. Excitement flashed through them all as would electric current. Even the official starter's voice grew shrill with excitement.

'Get set!' he commanded. He was using the formula for foot races, as he had never seen a dog race.

Then the shot, though expected, made them all jump.

The boy dog-trainers had done well. All the dogs in the race, except Blanca, seemed to know what it was all about. They were off in a bunch. But Blanca had never heard a pistol shot before, and she cowered to earth.

'Get up, you darned fool!' roared Hank, and she did get up. She tried to leap up and lick his face, to show her utter good will.

Half a block away, John was wildly calling Blanca, but there was such a bedlam about the dog that she couldn't hear him. Frank brought down his whip on her, but it was only a light switch and the big, thick-haired dog barely felt it. It only made her wish to turn around and kiss Frank.

Then John's voice penetrated the fog of sounds. He had run back toward her. And John had a way with

animals. He didn't roar commands at her or shriek pleas at her. His voice was glad, loving, inviting her to a romp. She was bewildered, but she still had a friend in John. She started toward him.

Then she knew he was playing with her, for he started to run away from her, still calling.

It was almost too late. Three of the dogs in the heat responded to the demands and entreaties of their drivers. They realized that they were racing, and the spirit of competition was in them. They knew where the finish line was, and strained to reach it ahead of their rivals. They did not bark or waste their energy in snarling at one another. They were almost nose and nose when the race was half over, with a fourth entry a good ten feet behind and Blanca twenty feet farther behind.

But out in front, John was calling to Blanca and Blanca was running to him. She thought all the dogs were trying to reach John for a romp, and she was thoroughly feminine. She was so fond of romping with John that she was jealous of even old Brownie, and seemed to feel hurt and neglected if John paid half as much attention to him as to her. Now she felt those strange dogs had no right whatever to John's pettings, and she must get to him first.

Frank, on the driver's seat, couldn't control her. He could guide her only a very little. She seemed to forget she had a cart behind her, and as she caught up with the fourth dog it looked as if the two carts would lock. But by jerking violently on the left rein, Frank succeeded in making Blanca veer just enough. The wheel hubs touched as he went by, and the breathless spectators expected to see the two drivers hurled from their seats by a crash. But there was

only a momentary jolt. And then Blanca was in fourth place.

John was fast on his feet. He could run almost as fast as Blanca could pull a cart. With a good head start, John could keep ahead of her quite a while. Once Blanca had realized he was calling her he had started running, still calling. Chuck, too, was calling, but John was afraid that if he stopped, exhausted, Blanca would run to him and frisk about him instead of running on to the finish. Racing and shouting and excitement had tired him so that he was ready to lie down in the road and pant like a dog himself, but he mustn't do that.

The three dogs that knew what they were doing hung to the lead. They were only inches apart, and no cart could be driven between them. Blanca was gaining at every bound, but it cost her time and strength to run around them. It was well for the hopes of the Seymours, though, that the other dogs were so well trained and well driven that they left no space for her to go between them, for if there had been space for her own extended body she would have forgotten her cart and her driver, and inevitably would have plunged into a crash.

She was trying to go around the other dogs when they turned the curve into the stretch. And there, on the inside, lay a large stone. The driver on the inside saw it just in time to try to swing his dog out, forgetting how close he was to the next cart. He did not quite succeed. His inside wheel hit the stone, and his cart was bounced farther toward the outside of the course. His outside wheel locked with a wheel of the cart beside it.

In an instant there was a crash, amid the hurling of fierce anathemas. One wheel was torn off the cart on the inside of the track. The two dogs were flung together so that instinctively they tried to snap at one another, but couldn't because of the bits in their mouths. Their drivers, both of whom had felt sure of winning, were infuriated, and were threatening to utterly annihilate one another. One who didn't know how wildly extravagant are the threats of boys would have expected murder. But the driver of the undamaged cart drove on.

But the crowd forgot them in an instant, for the three other dogs swept by them and dashed on for the finish line. Blanca still was behind, but the accident had made the two drivers ahead of her veer widely, leaving a chance for her to come through on the inside. John's eager, excited voice was in her ears, and the fearsome growlings of the dogs in the accident lent wings to her legs. She didn't know anything about the finish line, but she wished to get far from those fighting dogs — and John was calling.

The finish line was very close now. But so was John. And Frank, the driver, was crooning:

'Sic 'im, Blanca! Sic 'im! Sic 'im!'

Blanca didn't win the heat, but she qualified for the Derby by running second. And only her loving owners realized that she had run much faster than any other dog in the race. The other spectators, interested in their own dogs, saw Blanca only as an untrained pup that was as likely to run in the wrong direction as in the right one, and could not possibly have qualified had it not been for the accident putting two much better dogs out of the heat.

That impression was heightened just as the heat ended, when Snoopy came hurrying to the scene, accompanied by Melting Pot. Melting Pot was a natural bully, and at sight of the other dogs he began to snarl fiercely. That was enough for the timid Blanca. Instantly she left that place, dragging her cart behind her, and all the entreaties of the Seymour boys, who vainly ran after her, could not get her to stop. There was no actual dog fight, for Melting Pot, like the other dogs, was in harness. But the effect of the threatened fight on Blanca was instantaneous and complete.

Chuck was the most suspicious member of the family, and his suspicions were aroused.

'That's their game — to make Melting Pot scare Blanca out,' he declared. 'And there wasn't any big rock hid just around the turn before that heat was run. Somebody put that there on purpose, too.'

'Maybe somebody did,' agreed Hank, 'but let's not prove it, for Blanca was the one helped by it. If it hadn't been for that rock Blanca would be out of the Derby right now.'

'Yeah, but once we teach her to start right she can leave 'em all a mile behind,' stoutly averred Frank.

'Sure she can. But if they sic Melting Pot on some other dog just before the start of the Derby Blanca won't run in the Derby. She'll run home soon's they start snarling.'

'But we'll get Mack the cop to make 'em leave Melting Pot at home.'

'We can't. He's in the race.'

But the Seymour boys were not giving up. They put in all their spare time training Blanca, and in their

beds at night they whispered plans and stratagems. Now, all the kids in town knew Blanca was very fast, but that she was as likely as not to run in the wrong direction, or to stop in the middle of the race for a romp. Therefore they guessed that plenty of efforts would be made to distract her, and that Edward, Slick, Snoopy, et al. would count on terrifying her, and all the other timid dogs in the race. By aggravating Melting Pot at just the right moment, and inciting him to snap a few times, they could put most of the dogs in a mental state wholly unfitting them for a contest of speed. That, above all, was the strategic move they must checkmate.

In the spring when other fruit trees have got no farther than the blossom stage, the loquat tree bears fruit. There was a big loquat tree on the Seymour lot which annually produced its many gallons of stewed loquats and its many quarts of loquat jam. But, like many another Godsend, it was at times a source of great worry. The children would get into it too early. And loquats are like peanuts — after eating one you eat another and another and another without realizing what you are doing. But after you have eaten quite a number of unripe loquats you most emphatically realize what you have done.

The Seymour boys held their councils of war in the shade of the loquat tree, but they showed amazing self-discipline and sternness about sampling the fruit which hung in clusters above them. They were determined that their teamwork was to frustrate the Machiavellian schemes of Edward & Co. They worked out an artful spy system. Snoopy had a younger brother just Frank's age, and Frank learned

a few things by playing with him. The boys solemnly announced in Sylvia's presence that they had decided not to run Blanca in the race, because she was just too dumb to learn anything about the way to pull a cart — that she was always upsetting it and breaking it and running off the wrong way. Sylvia, being too young for guile, believed them and repeated those things to her little girl friends. The counter-spy system was likely to pick up such reports.

All the tops, marbles, kites, spare wheels, and similar small-boy treasures in Ourville were being wagered on the Derby. Shep was the favorite, with Melting Pot the second choice. Everyone was confident that Shep, the one dog with professional training, would win easily. Everybody, that is, except the Seymour boys. They knew the cards were stacked against them, that trickery had diminished their chance tragically, but still they had faith in their beloved dog, faith secret but abiding.

The discoveries of their intelligence service justified their fears. In the Derby, Melting Pot and Blanca would be lined up for the start within a few feet of one another — maybe side by side — and then a dog named Tige would appear. Tige always snarled at the sight of Melting Pot. He would be allowed to make a rush for Melting Pot but dragged back just as the fight started. As long as Tige was on a leash even Mack couldn't bar him from the scene.

However, the conspirators' timing might be wrong, and the teamwork of four determined lads might defeat them. Mack promised to be present when the race started, and declared he wouldn't allow any

shenanigans. And Blanca was learning fast. She was fond of playing with a rubber ball, and by aid of that ball they could get her to pursue Chuck as eagerly as she pursued the coaxing John. John could act as her pacemaker for half the distance, tempting her with the ball, and then throw it to Chuck, who could pace her the rest of the way.

But the boys knew they were in a contest with tricky foes, and they weren't relying merely on Blanca's speed, their teamwork, and the promises of Mack. They had other cards up their sleeves. Their training was done in the canyon near their home, and they were noticeably secretive about their plans. They knew how to arouse interest.

The fateful Saturday which was Derby Day arrived. Mom and Dad, the boys knew, were going to the city that morning, so they asked for their allowances at the breakfast table. But they did not mount their bicycles and dash into Ourville to spend their allowances as they usually did. They went out into the yard, like serious-minded youths, and applied themselves to duty. They seemed pervaded by industry until after Mom and Dad left, and then they became still more active, for a while. They put Blanca indoors, secured a number of the large paper bags known as market bags, and again gathered under the council tree. They knew they had been mysterious enough to arouse interest, and expected callers.

It was not long before they heard a whistle in front of the house which they recognized. It was the whistle of Snoopy. But they did not answer it. Instead, they grew much more interested in chores.

Another whistle, more imperative and impatient, came from the front of the house. The Seymours

exchanged pleased glances. That one came from Slick Gilkey. But they were too busy to answer.

Then they heard old Brownie bark. Brownie was so old that he no longer got to his feet to bark at anyone entering the yard, but still felt it his duty to announce either intruder or visitor, his bark varying so that the Seymours could almost tell by the sound of it whether a friend or a stranger was coming, and about what Brownie's opinion of the caller was. On this occasion his bow-wow-wow probably meant 'Brats! Brats! Brats!'

As the visitors came around the house they saw the four Seymour boys, each holding a large paper bag, staring at the loquat tree, apparently unconscious of their approach.

'Hey, you guys,' said Slick.

The Seymours turned and stared at him, as if still absorbed in weightier matters.

'Lo, Slick,' said Hank, perfunctorily. 'Hi, Snoop.'

The visitors joined them, looking all about. The Seymours paid no attention to them, but looked gloomily at the tree.

'How you bettin' on the Derby this aft?' asked Snoop.

'Who, us?' responded Chuck. 'Say, couldn't we postpone it a couple of weeks? Our dog would have a swell chance if we could only teach it to drive.'

'You don't want much, do you?'

'Well, why not? Shep's professional trained, ain't he? Of course, no ordinary dog has got a chance with him. All we can hope for is second, if our dog gets a lot of breaks.'

'Well, second ain't so bad. There's a three-dollar prize. Boy, could I use that!' contributed Slick.

'We might bet a little on second or third place,' said Hank. 'For sentimental reasons I'd like to bet on Blanca to win — this being payday — but that's just like wasting money.' He knew that proper English and such a long word as 'sentimental' would stagger both Slick and Snoopy.

'Maybe you could get some odds,' suggested Slick, who wished to show that he, too, was growing up.

'That's an idea,' said Hank. 'With odds I'd risk a little something — just for sentimental reasons.'

There was an awkward pause. It was clear that the visitors had something else in mind. They looked at one another uncertainly. Then Slick said:

'Why ain't you trainin' your dog?'

Then the Seymours understood. They wished to get a last look at Blanca. Perhaps some rumor that she was learning rapidly had slipped out, secretive though they had been. That made it the Seymours' turn to look at one another uncertainly.

'Well, I'll tell you,' said Hank, with an appearance of frankness and injury, 'we'd like to the best in the world. But we can't this morning. We got to pick loquats.'

Slick and Snoopy stared at the tree. They were always interested in other people's fruit trees when the fruit was ripening. But Snoopy shook his head in disgust.

'Huh!' he ejaculated. 'Them loquats ain't ripe.'

'That's what we told Mom,' agreed Hank, in an aggrieved tone. 'But she says they are. She says this kind of loquat never colors much and we've got to pick three or four bucketfuls apiece and put 'em in these bags.'

The spies looked at one another again, nonplused.

Quite clearly they had been foiled in the purpose of their visit. No doubt they had come to see Blanca working in harness, and felt they must go back with a report.

Slick suddenly became an impulsive friend.

'I sure wish that pup of yours was a little better trained,' he said. 'Edward is gonna be willin' to bet two to one on Shep, and we'd like awful well to bet a little on Blanca if we knew she'd run in the right direction.'

The Seymours knew that Slick was lying. But Hank and John, the good pretenders, pretended they didn't. They beamed joyously on their newly declared allies.

'Boy!' exclaimed John. 'Let's do train Blanca a little while, Hank.'

But Hank shook his head.

'You know we can't do it now,' he warned. 'Mom would be so mad she'd make us shut Blanca up for all day. No, we gotta pick these loquats right now, unless...' He looked on the visitors with inspiration shining in his face.

'Less what?' demanded Snoopy, the more gullible of the two visitors.

'Unless you guys will pick loquats for us while we train the dog,' he suggested.

Suspicion dawned in Slick's eyes. Hank had a reputation for slipping out of work, but so had Slick. Hank saw his indecision and impulsiveness swept over him.

'I'll tell you what,' he offered. 'We'll pay you kids a nickel a bucket to pick these loquats for us. That'll give you more money to bet.'

The visiting strategists looked at one another again,

trying to conceal their triumph. Loquats grow so close together that they are practically in bunches. At a nickel a bucket they could make at least a quarter apiece in an hour, and still have plenty of time to watch the training of Blanca from a distance. But they hesitated, to weigh all possibilities.

'Say,' said John to Hank, 'Mom may be sore ——'

'Not if we're actually paying these guys to do the work,' argued Hank.

'Maybe not. But you know how strong she put it. She said she wanted every one of us to come out here and pick loquats for an hour, and if we argued about it she'd keep all of us in all day.'

Hank lowered his voice to a confidential pitch, which the visitors weren't supposed to hear, but did.

'Don't yell so, you dumbbell,' he urged. 'She'll hear us and come out and spoil everything. . . . When we show Mom we're paying these guys out of our own pockets to do our work, so we can take a little time to give Blanca a workout, we can talk her out of punishment.'

'All right,' said John. 'But I'm worried.' And he looked it — the dissembler.

It seemed to Slick that the moment to clinch things had come.

'Sure,' he said, heartily, 'we'll do that for you — for a nickel a bucket. Sure we will. You go and train your dog.'

'We got to fix the harness first,' said John. 'She ran away last night and busted the harness.'

The Seymour boys handed over their buckets to the visitors and went toward the cellar. Their workshop was down cellar. Snoopy and Slick climbed into the loquat tree, with their eyes and their minds

elsewhere. To them it looked like easy money, which could be doubled by wagering — a period of unprecedented wealth. They were more intent on hearing and watching the Seymours than on the work they had undertaken, so they worked slowly. And the alert, deceptive Seymours, realizing that the spies were all eyes and ears rather than fingers, said and did things for the special benefit of their visitors. They dropped their voices to stage whispers when they especially wished Snoopy and Slick to listen.

The listeners heard much to comfort and reassure them. The evening before, the whisperers revealed, Blanca had been timed in three different tests on the course. And her best time was one minute thirty-two seconds. The spies in the tree exchanged joyous glances, for Shep had been timed in what they thought were secret trials in forty-nine seconds and Melting Pot in fifty-three seconds.

'She could do better than that if she would only keep running ahead,' said Hank. 'But she's always wanting to stop and play, or something. The darn fool dog just doesn't seem able to understand what it's all about. She's stupid.'

'She ain't either,' loyally asserted Frank. 'She's my dog, and if you guys are goin' to say mean things about her you can just keep out. I'm goin' to bet my money on her, all right.'

At last they had the harness ready and took Blanca out to the course they had marked off in the canyon. The treed spies couldn't see any of that course except the first fifty yards. And all they saw and heard gave them assurance of victory for Shep and Melting Pot that afternoon.

So much were their minds on other matters that

it was half an hour before Snoopy had picked a bucket of loquats. But no matter how absent the mind of a boy in a fruit tree is, his hands automatically convey something to his mouth every now and then. A few of the loquats were almost ripe, and whenever one looked as if it might be ripe investigative genius inspired the picker to sample it. In an hour each of the pickers had earned a dime and had eaten at least thirty loquats.

By that time they had, they thought, done such a thorough job of spying that they were eager to get away. So they got to work with vim, picking two more bucketfuls apiece in fifteen minutes. Then the Seymour boys came back, looking dejected but doggedly hopeful.

'Aw, say, you guys!' exclaimed John. 'We forgot all about you. Hope you ain't picked more'n we can pay for.'

'We picked four buckets apiece,' announced Slick, with warning belligerency in his voice.

'Boy! That's too bad. All we wanted was three buckets apiece. Didn't we tell you?'

'You sure didn't.'

'That's sure too bad,' said Hank. 'We can only pay you for three buckets apiece. That's all the money we got.'

'You can't put that over on us,' announced Slick. 'You don't get us to pick no four buckets and only get paid for three.'

'But listen,' said Hank, with frank contriteness, 'we don't want to cheat you. We just haven't any more money. We'll give you fifteen cents apiece, and give each of you one of these market bags. You take the fourth bucketful with you.... You see, we pay

you for all we can, and you keep the bucketful we can't pay for.'

There was argument, but in the end the spies took fifteen cents apiece and a bag of loquats they didn't want, loquats so green that only one in ten of them was ripe enough to cook. But they had worked for them — they represented pay — and they did their best to get value out of them. They were keeping up a slow but determined attack on them as the Seymours watched them out of sight.

The Derby was scheduled for three o'clock. That was the time when Mr. Hull, who was very busy on Saturdays, had promised to be present to act as judge at the finish line. Lester Skipperson was to act as official starter.

Most of the contestants and half the boys in Ourville were on the ground by two o'clock. Hank Seymour sauntered into the crowd at two-fifteen, looked about a little anxiously, and asked if Blanca hadn't been brought over yet. In confidence, he told one friend that Blanca hadn't been feeling too well that morning, but asked him not to let the news go any farther. By two-thirty it had swept through the crowd from ear to ear.

All sorts of rumors and stable gossip were flying. Nearly everyone knew, in confidence, that Edward and Snoopy and Slick had it all arranged for Tige to appear at the last moment and give Blanca a good scare, and probably nervously upset other dogs in the race. And nearly everyone knew that Mack, the cop, had been appealed to to prevent such tactics, and had promised to be present. And now the whisper was traveling, like wind through a forest, that Ed-

ward had some trick up his sleeve which would prevent Mack from getting there. The childlike eagerness of all boys and most grownups to be the bearers of inside information made the untrustworthy friend to whom Hank had confided his secret worry buzz like a bee from flowerlike ear to ear.

Edward, not driving but leading Shep, arrived at two-thirty. Shep was a beautifully trained dog. Unless his master gave him leave, he would pay no attention to the snarling and yipping of other dogs. He was big and handsome, and bore himself proudly. He was better groomed than any of the other dogs, and the two-wheeled cart he drew was built like a racing sulky. It was polished so that as the spokes turned they threw dazzling reflections of the sun. All the boys in Ourville had seen and admired that cart before, but now they gathered about it, newly impressed because of the importance of the occasion.

Edward looked about the crowd.

'Why,' he asked, 'where's the gang? Where are all the Seymour brats and their dog? And where are Snoopy and Slick?'

Those in the know — which included practically all the boys present — exchanged knowing smiles. They knew he didn't expect to find Snoopy there — that Snoopy and Tige were to come over the hill at just the last minute, and start a rumpus. And they guessed that Slick was at Snoopy's, arranging the final details. It was good acting on Edward's part. It was establishing an alibi.

'Ain't seen no Seymours yet, 'cept Hank,' called one urchin, nodding toward Hank.

Hank appeared not to have heard. He came strolling toward Edward as if he had noticed his resplend-

ent cart for the first time. Everyone had been impressed by that cart, and the crowd watched keenly to catch Hank's reaction.

'Where'd you get that coffee-grinder?' asked Hank.

That was a complete surprise. It made the crowd laugh, and Edward flush.

'Coffee-grinder?' he snapped. 'I'll bet it'll finish the race ahead of anything the Seymours can put in.'

'Oh, yeah? How much'll you bet?'

'Any amount,' declared Edward, dramatically and eagerly.

'All right,' said Hank. 'How about a million dollars?'

'Aw, you know what I mean. I mean any amount any of us kids could put up.'

Hank chuckled and turned away. He had won the tilt. The crowd was laughing at Edward again. Edward couldn't take derision.

'I thought you came over here to do some bettin',' he yelled after Hank.

'Oh, no,' drawled Hank, over his shoulder. 'If you can't bet real money you can't interest me.'

Edward assumed that Hank had no money. The Seymour boys never had more than fifty cents at a time, and rarely had he seen one with more than a quarter. He followed Hank, to taunt him into either betting or admitting he had no money. But Hank only tossed out replies which made the other boys giggle and added to Edward's irritation.

Lester Skipperson arrived to start the race. Still the other Seymour boys, and their dog, and Slick and Melting Pot had not appeared.

'Look here, boys,' announced Lester, 'this race must start at three precisely. I've got to be back at

the store by three-fifteen. It's just exactly fourteen minutes of three now.'

Edward looked a little worried. It was all right for Snoopy and Tige to be absent. That was according to plan. But Slick and Melting Pot should be there. He looked about for someone he could send with a hurry call for Slick. He saw a ten-year-old boy he thought he could trust, with a bicycle, and started to draw him aside for whispered orders. But just then Hank, who had been eluding him, strode up to him.

'I see Blanca coming at last,' said Hank. 'You talked a lot about wanting to bet. You kept daring me to put up or shut up. What odds'll you give?'

'What do you mean, odds? This ain't the kind of race they give odds on.'

'Why not? If you're any sort of sport you ought to give odds of five to one.'

'You're crazy. But, by heck, I will give two to one.'

'Two to one? When you've got the only really trained dog in the race, all you'll give is two to one?'

Blanca arrived. The crowd surged about her, but the Seymour boys formed a cordon to protect her. They wouldn't let anyone touch her. Mr. Hull arrived and asked if all were ready. And Hank and Edward still were snapping insults at one another — and Edward's messenger still hadn't started to Slick's house.

Still Edward was sure Hank couldn't produce more than fifty cents, and determined to humiliate him.

'If you're scared to bet at two to one,' he declared, 'I'll bet you three to one on any amount of money you can put up.'

Until then all had been reckless talk, of millions, of thousands, of hundreds, and other amounts no boy ever dreamed of having in actual cash. But now suddenly things grew tense. Hank thrust a hand into his pocket, and money jingled there.

'Three to one?' he demanded.

'Yes, three to one. Put up or shut up.'

'I'll just take two dollars' worth of that,' said Hank.

Edward's face blanched. He had a crisp, new five-dollar bill in his pocket. Among Ourville boys, that was a lot of money. But the sickening realization came to him that he would have to have six dollars to cover two dollars at three to one, and after the talking he had been doing it would be most embarrassing not to be able to cover Hank's money. But still he couldn't believe that a Seymour would have two whole dollars, all at once.

'Let's see your money,' he demanded.

Hank smiled and drew his fist out of a trouser pocket. As he opened it, it was full of change — quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies. It was the combined fortunes of the four Seymour boys. But counting and recounting proved the sum to be correct. Hank was offering to bet two dollars in coin of the realm. And Edward couldn't cover it at the odds offered.

He borrowed another dollar, in small change similar to Hank's, from various members of the crowd. Most people like to lend to one they feel sure is about to win an imposing amount of money. The wager was posted in Lester Skipperson's hands.

'All right,' announced Lester. 'And now it's two minutes of three. We must get started.'

Edward swiftly looked all about, in sudden alarm.

'But we can't,' he protested. 'Melting Pot isn't here. He's one of the best dogs in the race.'

'Very noble of you,' said Lester. 'Very sportsmanlike. But everybody in town knows this race is to start on the dot at three o'clock, and that's less than two minutes away now. Mr. Hull has been at his place at the finish line for some time, and I must get the dogs lined up to go.'

The boy Edward had tried to send as a call boy for Melting Pot had been fascinated by the maneuvering leading up to the placing of a breath-taking wager, and had not yet stirred. Now he suddenly came awake.

'I'll get Melting Pot in two minutes,' he promised, and sped away on his bicycle.

Three o'clock came. So did a messenger from Mr. Hull, announcing that all was ready at the finish line. Lester ordered the dogs lined up for the start. And still Melting Pot had not appeared on the horizon. And where were Snoopy Alkus and Tige? And where was Mack, the cop?

Edward delayed things all he could. Four, five, six minutes passed and still no Blucher arrived. But the messenger Edward had sent came whirring back, loud with importance.

'Meltin' Pot won't run today,' he announced. 'Slick's sick abed and his Ma's dosin' him with castor oil. He an' Snoopy been eatin' green loquats.'

Edward's jaw dropped in panic.

'What about Snoopy?' he demanded.

'Aw, they say he's still worse,' reported the messenger. 'They got Doctor Jasper workin' on him.'

The first — and last — annual Ourville Dog Derby was run without the competition of Melting Pot or the interference of Tige. Shep, as was expected, got off in the lead. But a shrill, piercing whistle from John, followed by eager shouts of 'Yere, Blanca! Yere, Blanca! Yere! Yere! Yere!' penetrated the fog of sound and caused the white dog to leap forward. Shep was a gallant animal, but Frank was much lighter than Edward, and Blanca had much less to pull. She gained steadily but slowly. At the half she was a length of dog and cart behind, but at the three-quarters she was drawing up almost even. She still was a little behind, yet was in the act of passing Shep.

Until that moment Edward had thought his dog was going to win. Shep had got away to a good start, and Edward had never looked behind. But there was a corner to turn at the three-quarter post, and Blanca had come sweeping around that corner with such a burst of speed that he knew his dog could not equal it. He was carrying a whip, though he had been warned never to use a whip on Shep. He had thought that the sight of it might scare other dogs, especially Blanca, and he snatched it. He had intended to merely swish it toward her, but sudden fury seized him, and he tried to slash her fiercely across the nose.

But Blanca was already out of reach. The blow fell short. The whip did no more than flick her. The full force of it, though, landed on the shaft. It struck so hard that it wrapped itself around and around the shaft. Then, as Blanca leaped forward, it slipped into a tangle with the harness. Edward tried to snatch it back, but could not. He reared out of his seat in the effort, and was yanked sprawling into the street.

As he fell, he let go of the whip, and Blanca finished with the whip still trailing from her harness. She finished far ahead. Shep, driverless, finished second. But the evidence, the whip knotted in Blanca's harness, was irrefutable, and Shep was disqualified. Second prize went to a Mexican lad named Pedro.

The twenty-mule-team quartet felt rich beyond the dreams of avarice. But the triumph of victory was sweeter than the thrill of sudden wealth. And they were just savages enough to get most thrill of all out of the trophy of that triumph, a trophy they would cherish for many a day, to Edward's undying regret. The trophy was a shiny whip with a gay tassel on the end of it.

I 6—MOM SEYMOUR GETS CLUB-MINDED

EVER since Sylvia put Mom into society by showing Marion the marvelous closetful of Hollywood costumes, the rumor had been spreading through Ourville that the Seymours really amounted to something. Someone who saw Dad depositing a check in the bank remarked to Herb Ingram, the cashier, as Dad walked out:

'I guess he gets some pretty big checks for some of those stories of his.'

Herbie, who never said anything to hurt anybody, smiled and nodded.

That was noncommittal enough, but the inquirer had hardly got out on the street when he said importantly to another villager:

'Herb Ingram tells me, in confidence, that that fellow Seymour gets some awful big checks for some of his stories.' And before evening of that day rumor had grown to a confidential report that that morning Gregory had received a check for several thousand dollars for some story he had sold.

The community began to take pride in the fact that Gregory Seymour's name was on the cover of numerous magazines, even though most of them were the magazines which have pictures of men flourishing pistols on the covers.

Had the community known the actual amount of the check Seymour deposited, and the fact that he had hurried to the bank with it for fear he was overdrawn, it could not have been so much impressed. But the Seymours had reached the point at which the bank would let them overdraw without getting unduly nervous, for Greg had built a market after laborious years. There were even a couple of magazines which would have paid him as much as five hundred dollars in advance if he asked for it, on his promise to write a novelette to clear the slate.

And then Mom was invited to join the Ourville Woman's Club.

'Do you know,' she said to Dad, as she showed him the letter of invitation, 'I believe I'll join it... I feel as if I owed it to your position.'

Dad nodded uninterestedly, then chuckled a little, drew a notebook from his pocket, and hurriedly scribbled in it.

'What are you writing down?' demanded Mom suspiciously.

'Oh, nothing, dear. Just a vagrant thought which happened to cross my mind.'

'I saw that mean little smirk on your face. What was it?'

'Well, if you must know, I wrote: "Whenever a woman wants a new dress, rug, or what not she knows her husband can't afford she argues that she owes it to his position."'

Mom bridled with asperity which she quickly changed into indignation.

'I've been the stay-at-home body of this household long enough,' she declared. 'For nearly seventeen years it's been my job to look after the young children.'

Now the children are big enough to look after themselves now and then. With Hank in junior college and Chuck in high school, we should have at least two we could leave in charge any evening we wished to go out, with assurance that they would take care of the others all right. And with all the children in school nearly all day, there's no reason why I shouldn't go to a club meeting once a week or so... I'm going to join that club.'

No mention of Dad's position that time, but Dad didn't smile.

'Why, dear, I would, by all means,' he said, heartily. 'The world is full of people who think they are neglected just because they neglect other people. If you wish to make friends and really be part of a community, you must not sit sulking in your tent waiting for people to drag you out. You must meet them halfway, go where they are and invite them to visit you. No doubt there are plenty of people here who imagine we sneer at community gatherings just because we rarely go to them. You doubtless will find the club interesting and — if you keep your sense of humor — entertaining.'

'I'll fill out the application blank this red-hot minute,' said Mom.

Like most towns in the matriarchy of Southern California, Ourville was run by women. There was a strong Masonic lodge in the town, but it had no building of its own. It met at the Woman's Club building. So did all the other town groups. Local talent performances were given there, and sometimes itinerant evangelists held services there for a week or two, on the evenings when it was not needed by any

of its regular or preferred tenants. It was a big clubhouse for such a little town, and the clubwomen had to serve dinners to all the other organizations in order to pay for it. The Woman's Club kitchen was the only one in town from which two hundred dinners could be served efficiently, and the Woman's Club auditorium was the only one big enough for a Red Cross benefit performance, and the Woman's Club stage was the only one big enough for a school commencement, minstrel show, or revival choir.

The Ourville Woman's Club was, in brief, in the catering business as a side line. It served the weekly luncheon to the Kiwanis Club, the monthly dinner to the Masons, the bi-weekly dinner to the Town Forum, and practically all the other town gatherings which had to be fed, besides the weekly club luncheon and frequent club dinners to which the community was invited. As the sole purpose of such activities was to make money for the club, it was members of the club who composed the committees which cooked the food and served it and cleared up the dishes afterward.

Never having belonged to a country town woman's club, Mom did not know all that. So she felt tremendously flattered when, at the first meeting she attended, she was appointed hospitality chairman.

'I'm really embarked on a social career now,' she told Dad when she got home. 'I've only been a clubwoman one day, and I'm chairman of a committee already. At least once a week I'm going to get clear away from greasy domesticity and be a Madame Chairman. Don't you call that quick recognition of my intellectual powers?'

'It must be,' agreed Dad. 'Unless, of course, they

were lying in wait for you. What is the committee?’

‘Hospitality,’ said Mom. ‘You see, they’re getting ready for a big affair they call Reciprocity Day, when members of dozens of other clubs will be guests of ours, and our president, Mrs. Masters, said she thought it would be fitting to have a hospitality chairman who had lived in Europe and acquired *savoir faire*. Of course she was just being complimentary, but it sounds sort of nice.’

‘You certainly seem to have grown club-minded all of a sudden,’ said Dad. ‘You’ve talked of nothing else since you came home.’

‘Well,’ said Mom, ‘if I go into a thing at all I want to go into it right, and make a success of it.’

‘Just what will be your duties?’ asked Dad.

‘Oh, I don’t know. I suppose all I’ll have to do is try to look my best and greet people — sort of hostess-like. But we’ll have a committee meeting tomorrow. I can tell you more after that.’

Mom was a very shy new member of the Ourville Woman’s Club, but it was surprising how her hidden worth was recognized, and honors were thrust upon her. Reciprocity Day was the most important day of the club year, and committee meetings and conferences to plan for it were held several times a day. The Seymours were early risers, but often the telephone rang before they were up because some clubwoman who arose still earlier wished to talk with Mom. Still more frequently it rang after they had gone to bed because some other clubwoman who kept late hours also wished to talk with Mom. Mom had to go to the clubhouse every day for a luncheon conference with somebody, and as plans progressed she

found herself staggering under the honors and responsibility of a generalissimo. She was to make all the French dressing because she knew how they made it in France, she was to supervise the making of all the salad, she was to direct the girls who were to serve, and see to it that as soon as dishes were used they would be retrieved and washed, as the club did not have enough silver and dishes for as big a crowd as was expected.

The refreshments seemed to be the important thing about Reciprocity Day. The president assured Mom that if the women from other clubs didn't get something good to eat, daintily served, they would go away with a very poor idea of the intellectuality of the Ourville Woman's Club.

'It is so comforting to be sure that you will give just the needed touch of style and simple elegance,' purred Mrs. Masters, the president. 'We put such reliance on your good taste, my dear.'

'I'll do my best,' said Mom, modestly but earnestly. For she, too, had come to believe that the whole future welfare of Ourville rested on the success of Reciprocity Day. She had become thoroughly club minded.

Reciprocity Day formally began at eleven o'clock in the morning, but Mom was up at five. She had so many things to do at the clubhouse that she wondered if she could have everything in readiness by eleven. Mrs. Mortimer Mudd was chairman of the table decorations committee, but Mom had realized that she would have to 'co-operate' with Mrs. Mudd by doing most of the work herself if she wished it done. She knew there would be large quantities of flowers,

terns, and vine cuttings arriving from those members of the club who had lovely gardens, and that Mrs. Mudd probably wouldn't be on hand to receive and care for them, as Mrs. Mudd was always late. Miss Moreland was entertainment chairman, and Mom knew that if all the speakers she had programmed for 'a few words' talked, the twelve-thirty luncheon couldn't be served until one-thirty. And then there were the singers and musicians. A speaker who is asked to take five minutes may take ten or fifteen, but as yet none has had the nerve to arise and announce: 'I will make three speeches. My first speech will be on the subject: "Whither Are We Drifting?" My second speech will be on the subject: "Trends of Modern Art," and my third speech will be on the subject: "The Next War."' I choose these widely different subjects, you understand, in order to show the wide range of my information.' But singers and musicians seemed to think they had a perfect right to sing or play groups of numbers which would show off their versatility, no matter how the program was dragging out.

Then, too, a dozen members had agreed to lend silverware, vases, and pictures, and Mom suspected that she had better be on hand when they arrived. In fact, she thought she might better take her budget book along, and keep books on the borrowed things in the back pages.

Inexperienced though she was as a clubwoman, her surmises were correct. When she reached the clubhouse no one was there except the janitor. Shortly afterward, however, gardeners, chauffeurs, and husbands began driving up with cut flowers, potted plants, or some of the different things the club was

borrowing for the day. And each of those messenger boys had instructions from the lender.

Mom had to hear all about three paintings which were almost old masters. The chairman of the art committee should have been responsible, but she wasn't there, so Mom realized that she had become responsible — for the proper hanging, history, and safe return of those pictures.

It was the same with the silverware and borrowed china. Mom, hospitality chairman, was directly responsible for that. One donated cake came in on a very beautiful plate, and the droopy-looking husband who brought it said:

'Sally told me to be sure and tell you to see that she got this plate back. Not namin' any names, but one hospitality chairman sent her back a Wedgwood plate with a big chip out of it, and once we lost three spoons.'

Mom gasped. Realization that her very reputation was at stake almost overpowered her. She resolved to look after that plate herself — even wash it herself — and return it to the owner herself.

She also decided to hang the more valuable pictures herself. The janitor was so busy getting two hundred folding chairs out of the cellar and dusting them that she saw he would never get around to it. And the art chairman still had not appeared.

It was ten o'clock before anyone else appeared. Then the decoration chairman telephoned that she would be delayed, and wouldn't Mom just go ahead and put the flowers on the tables, and she (the decorations chairman) could add the finishing touches when she got down?

Mom had already done a day's work by then, and was getting tired. Where were all the other women who had been so prominent at committee meetings? Where was Mrs. Masters, the club president?

It was nearly eleven o'clock before she knew where they were. Then she realized that while she had been working like four charwomen they had been at the beauty parlor. They were all beautiful and resplendent and quite ready to receive their guests, while Mom's sleeves were rolled up to her elbows, her face was beaded with sweat, her hair was awry. Mrs. Masters looked at her with apparent discomfort, and Mom fled to the kitchen as the first guests arrived.

'Now you ladies have got here,' was her Parthian shot, 'I can let you take charge of your own jobs.'

She hoped to make herself presentable in the kitchen. But there was plenty for her to do there. More things which must be kept track of were coming in. Luncheon was supposed to be at twelve-thirty, and you can't prepare to serve luncheon to two hundred people in any less time than an hour and a half, when you have a hodge-podge of contributed foods to fill the plates with. Making salad alone for that many people was a job. But the biggest job was handling the interruptions. Woman after woman, beautifully dressed, slipped out into the kitchen to give Mom instructions about her cake or her sandwiches or her crystal. They couldn't stop and help. They were too daintily clad to more than flit through a kitchen. But, confound them, they all came in long enough to add to Mom's perplexities.

The serving was to be done by the Juniors, daughters of members, and other young girls of the town, and Mom had to organize and direct them, without any

rehearsal. They began to drift in about noon. They were nice girls, and some of them helped, and others got in the way trying to help.

By a series of superhuman efforts, Mom was all ready to serve at twelve-thirty. But the polite applause was stretching out the program so that it was plain it would be after one before the crowd got to the tables. It had been twelve-fifteen before the address of welcome and the response had been accomplished. Mrs. Masters honestly thought she had talked only five minutes, but had talked fourteen, by the kitchen clock, as Mom could testify. And the respondent had been as bad.

Then came the problem of keeping the warm things warm for another hour.

At last the luncheon was served, and Mom considered it spoiled. Nothing was quite as she had planned it to be. However, she was too busy to worry much, except in a dull, dazed way. Each of twenty women who had given or lent something for the luncheon had given her some private instructions, which had to be remembered. One dear member had even whispered to her a warning against another dear member, 'Don't let her pick out her own spoons, or some of the rest of us may not get all of ours.' They all seemed to hold Mom responsible for everything.

She had written down the number of articles received from every 'donor,' and brief descriptions, and she hoped for the best, though she vaguely feared the worst. Then, too, some of the girls who were to serve were very careless. One of them, sighting an ornate cake stand, cheerily cried: 'Oh, do let me take that in and stumble with it. Everybody in town

knows it's Mrs. Puckett's and is tired of seeing it.'

Hints of all the little town and family rivalries came out. Every now and then Mom felt as if there were a new flash of gray in her hair.

Once the luncheon began, there was so much to supervise in the kitchen that Mom had no chance to even stick her nose into the dining-room. Her prettiest dress was under her apron, but only bits of it showed around the edges. And as soon as the clearing of the tables began she sorted out the more fragile china, and washed it herself. She was in the midst of that when one of the girls who had been waiting on table called:

'Oh, Mrs. Seymour! Mrs. Masters wants you to come and take a bow.'

'What's that?'

'Mrs. Masters wants you to come in the dining-room to take a bow.'

Mom's heart warmed a little. At least, they appreciated it. She had never worked so hard before, but it must have been a success, or they wouldn't think of dragging her out of the kitchen that way. It was something to be publicly thanked before two hundred of the leading clubwomen of the county. She had never expected it, and felt very shy, yet it seemed such evidence of achievement, despite inexperience and great difficulties, that a thrill trembled about her heart. One of the girls got on each side of her, and propelled her toward the swinging door into the dining-room.

When she got in the dining-room, she found all of her serving girls lined up. One of them whispered to Mrs. Masters, who was presiding. Mrs. Masters turned, beamingly.

'Now, ladies,' she trumpeted, 'I wish to present to you the ladies who served you this delicious luncheon. The young ladies who served are Miss Dorothy Weebles ——'

Miss Weebles stepped forward and took a bow, amid bored handclapping.

'Miss Birdie McMurphy ——' continued Mrs. Masters; Miss McMurphy stepped forward and bowed to even more perfunctory handclapping. Evidently a great many unimportant people had been presented already, and all the guests were weary of the performance. Mom wished to slip back into the kitchen and spare the guests at least one introduction, but she could not.

Mrs. Masters had introduced so many people that she, too, was weary, and quite a little flurried. She introduced Gay Merriman as Gay Merriam, a mistake which always made the Merrimans furious. Mom philosophically decided to listen and get what fun she could out of it by noticing how many slips of the tongue Mrs. Masters made.

At last all the girls were introduced, and Mrs. Masters said:

'And now, last but not least, I wish to present the lady who had supervision of all these charming young ladies, our hospitality chairman, Mrs. Gregory.'

The mechanical clapping began, and Mrs. Masters glanced blandly down at her voluminous notes, quite satisfied with herself and ready to start introducing some other group. Mom couldn't help a short, hard laugh out loud. Under the press of weightier affairs, Mrs. Masters had forgotten her surname. Her reward for doing most of the work for which the exquisitely gowned decorations chairman had been applauded,

for hanging pictures for the art chairman, for acting as assistant janitor, headwaitress, scullion, and nearly everything else was one brief moment of applause for a nonexistent Mrs. Gregory.

She hurried back to the kitchen. Her main worry was about getting all the borrowed things back to their rightful owners.

The bevy of girls who had been introduced with her did not return to the kitchen with her. They seemed to think their work was done. They had seen Mom washing dishes, and had stacked up great piles of them for her to wash. Now they were getting their share of the social side of the party

It was five o'clock that evening when Mom wearily entered her home and dropped into a chair.

'Well,' said Dad, 'how did the party go?'

'It was a triumph for you and the children,' said Mom.

'That's too deep for me. What do you mean?'

Just then the telephone rang. John answered.

'It's for you, Mom,' he announced. 'It's Mrs. Masters.'

'Tell her I'm lying down and can't be disturbed,' said Mom. John stared, for she wasn't lying down. But she was slumped in a chair.

John turned to the phone.

'Mom says she's lyin' down and can't be disturbed,' he said. Then, after a moment he called to Mom:

'Mrs. Masters says they're havin' a very important meetin' of the committee tomorrow mornin' at ten ——'

'Tell her I can't be there,' snapped Mom.

John relayed the message. Then, after another moment he called:

'She wants to talk to you, Mom, if it's possible.'

'Tell her it isn't possible.'

'She says she's gone to bed and can't talk to you,' John said.

Another pause. Then John reported:

'She says she'll call you early in the morning.'

Dad chuckled. But Mom turned on him almost wildly.

'It won't make any difference when she calls,' she declared, 'I'm not going. I joined the club as a relaxation, not to make a vocation of it. Why, some of those women can make an all-day affair of it and then hold conferences about it the rest of the time. But I just can't. I've had to let dinner burn while they kept me on the telephone. I've had to telephone the school cafeteria to hold the children there for luncheon while I dashed over to the club, after I had everything ready for luncheon here. I've had to ruin my budget. I just won't do it any more.'

'But it's Ourville's society. It's the organization of our best people. Don't you enjoy the contacts?'

'My contacts have mostly been with the kitchen stove and the kitchen sink,' Mom almost shrieked, half laughing and half hysterical.

'Why, my dear,' said Dad, surprised, 'you don't seem very club-minded this evening.'

'Club-minded?' cried Mom, wildly, 'Club-minded? — I joined the club to get into society and I've worked all day as janitress, waitress, and dishwasher. Club-minded!... Club-minded! Why, if I'd stayed on my feet in that kitchen any longer I'd have been club-footed!'

Next day Mom resigned, by mail.

I 7—THE ETERNAL CAR QUESTION

FOR some time there had been argument in the Seymour household as to whether Hank should have a car. Hank had learned to drive so well that all visitors to the house were warned to lock their cars, or Hank might get to monkeying with them and decide to drive 'around the block.' He never took the cars without permission, but once he got permission he could find the longest way around any block. And his fingers itched so at sight of a car he might drive that the family took no chances.

After the day he drove an intoxicated man to his home, and was well paid for it, Hank was on the lookout for drunk drivers, hoping for a repetition of that experience. But it isn't every drunk driver who knows that he is drunk, and is willing to turn over the wheel to a boy picked up on the road.

Hank was in junior college now, and the distance was too far for him to travel by bicycle. Or he said it was too far. Probably his dignity was a greater obstacle than the distance. And the trip by inter-urban to the union school required early rising. So Hank argued logically and well, but Dad remained adamant.

'Prove that you can earn enough money to buy a car and keep it up,' he said, 'and I will stand behind

you for the driver's license. I'll also pay what your interurban fare each week should be. But nobody who can't support a car should have one. If your earnings go into it you will be much more careful with it than you will if only my earnings go into it. And if you are not careful you may sink us all.'

'But even "Heel," whose father is on relief, drives a car to school.' 'Heel' was a Mexican lad whose name was spelled 'Gil.'

'Naturally. His father can sign his application without risk because he has nothing to risk. But we have visible property. If you get in an accident we can be sued.'

Hank determined to work and save and get himself a car. But it was always so much easier to spend whatever money he got than to save it that at the end of a month he had not started.

But luck played into his hands, as it so often did. That winter was unprecedented. Districts in which recorded temperatures had never before dropped below twenty-eight degrees shivered to temperatures of twenty, and in all the orange and lemon groves the smudge pots had to be kept burning night and day. There was so much smudge in the air that in Ourville stores had to close, and every housewife was wailing of what was happening to her curtains. White houses turned gray over night, and many families actually fled the smudge, locking up their houses and going into Los Angeles or somewhere out of the smudge belt for a week or two.

It took many men to keep those millions of smudge pots burning, and the men were well paid, so Hank Seymour rejoiced while others wept. For the first

time in his life he was earning real money, not just a small allowance from his father. And when the smudge cleared away he had enough money in his pocket to buy a used — or ab-used — car.

The evening he drove it home Dad was both proud and sad. He knew that whenever Hank had gasoline to run that car he would be going somewhere, that many a night he and Mom would lie abed pretending to sleep but worrying because their eldest was out so late. Yet he was proud of the boy for earning his own, and was ready to make good on his promise about the driver's license.

'I'll go down with you tomorrow to get it,' he promised.

But tomorrow is a long, long time for any boy to wait for. After dinner Hank wished to try out his new vehicle. He invited Mom to take a ride around the block, and she accepted, hiding her misgivings. For the car rattled as if its dissolution were imminent, and looked as if it were very loosely put together. But Hank vowed that the engine was a wonder, and Mom agreed that it certainly seemed to be. She appreciated getting the first ride in Hank's car, and it was comforting to her to see what a careful driver he was. He wasn't going a bit over twenty miles an hour, and slowed down at every corner to make sure that all was clear around the corner before he turned it.

He said he was going to drive her around the block, and that was as far as he drove her. That, too, was encouraging.

So Mom went into the house comforted. And Hank drifted almost noiselessly away — by coasting the first half block — to demonstrate the darling new car to a few other people.

He had, of course, bought the car to go to school in. But it would also be nice to take a girl to a dance in now and then, and he itched to take it up and show it to Helen Griswald. But first he wished to know what it would do. He must familiarize himself with it so that he would have complete mastery of it. He must learn all its tricks and quirks.

The street in front of Edward Willis's seemed the ideal place to try out the car. A car was the one thing Edward demanded which his mother wouldn't let him have. It would be a real pleasure to make Edward envious, for once. And while a man of seventeen — Hank was almost seventeen — couldn't show open interest in a mere child of only fourteen, that pretty little Gale girl living next door to Edward might be worth giving a thrill to.

It would be dark soon, for Southern California has no twilight. But it still was light enough to see and be seen when he clattered and banged his precious (to him) new possession into the neighborhood of the Willises and the Gales. As best he could, he imitated the whistle peculiar to Snoopy Alkus as he slowly drove past the Willis home. At the next corner he turned and came racing back at top speed. Then he cruised slowly past once more, peering through the deepening gloom for some sign of spectators, but could see none.

Oh, well, it was fun anyway, even if nobody saw it. And the little old boat certainly had gone whizzing down the street when he let it out!

No slight disappointment could depress him on a night when he was trying out his first car. Boy! It might not look like much, but it could travel. It had picked up so fast it had almost taken his breath

away. He wished there was someone he might race, for that was the only way to really know what a car could do.

He had promised only to drive around the block, but this was important. He simply had to see how fast that boat would go. He knew a place out on the State Highway where a man could drive eighty miles an hour with safety, a flat stretch with visibility on all sides and no intersections for fully three miles. He would be so careful that there could be no chance of any trouble, but he must go out there and give his car one real workout.

It was darker than midnight when he reached the State Highway, for the moon was not yet up. Distant headlights swam toward him through the dark like fireflies. As far as he could see they were streaming toward him, an endless procession. But the cars were pretty well spaced, so that was all right. As long as they weren't continually trying to pass one another, and getting over on his side of the white line down the center, he would be all right, no matter how fast he traveled.

He had no speedometer, but he had heard it said that most cars on that stretch of highway maintained a speed of fifty miles or more. Only the week before the *Ourville Sentinel-Enterprise-Tribune* had complained of the way people raced over there, alleging that any driver who didn't go more than fifty was likely to be run over from behind. That was all Hank had read of the article, and he had made mental note of it as the place where he should try out his car.

He did not know that the conclusion of the article sternly called on the Traffic Commission to put an end

to a situation which was causing far too many accidents.

It was a perfect road, one hundred and twenty feet wide, with four traffic lanes. It seemed almost a sin not to go as fast as one could on that road.

Hank began experimenting. There was a car ahead of him. He decided to see if he could overtake and pass it.

Once he let his car out, he was elated to see how quickly it picked up speed, and brought the car ahead back to it. In a moment he swept gloriously past the other car, and he could not help flashing a look of triumph toward it as he did so.

He slowed down as soon as he was safely past. But ahead of him there was an endless line of tail lights, and he began to sigh like an Alexander for new cars to conquer. For all he knew, that car he had passed might not have been going more than twenty-five. He decided to pass another car. He had passed the first car so easily it was hard to believe it was making fifty.

He didn't gain so rapidly on the car ahead, but he gained, and when he could see it clearly a flood of joy swept over him. It was a sport model with a young couple in it. He felt sure they were going more than fifty. People of that age, in a car which would do ninety, couldn't be doing less than fifty.

The headlights of the car he had passed swept over him. He glanced behind. Oh, boy! It was to be a three-cornered race. That driver had awakened and accepted his challenge. This was going to be fun.

The miles were zipping by. He didn't know how fast, because of his lack of a speedometer. If the other cars were going that fast, it must be all right,

but he must show 'em that his little boat might look sort of funny but had the heart of a conqueror.

He believed he still was gaining on the car ahead, the sporty car which had cost almost a hundred times what his had! He hardly dared believe it, but he knew that it was true. He was so close now, and the headlights of the rear car helped so much, that he could see the young couple in the car he was pursuing looking anxiously around at him. But in spite of all they could do he still was gaining — he was gaining faster! He would be lapping them in a minute, ahead of them in half a minute more!

He dimly realized that he was no longer out in the lonely night. The light of shops and street intersections fell on him. The chase had been much longer than he realized, and they were speeding into a good-sized town. But a man about to win his first triumph with his first car cannot stop to think about things like that. Half a minute now and it would be all over, for the car he was passing was fading away. It was all washed up. It had made its little spurt, but could not keep it up as Hank's marvelous discovery could. To think that he had picked up that honey in a used-car lot for only thirty-five dollars!

Over his shoulder he flung a derisive laugh at the young couple he was leaving behind.

And then he heard a siren.

His blood froze. He felt a wild impulse to flee so fast that the siren would be left behind. His car had shown it could do it, all right.

But the siren shrieked again, and he realized it came from the car he had swept past so grandly when he first decided to challenge someone to a race — the

car which had not taken up the challenge until he had tried to pass the sport car.

Before he could make up his mind what to do, he had flashed past two more street intersections. But to his surprise, the car behind was gaining on him now, and the siren was shrieking.

He gave up hope of escape and drew up to the curb. He realized dimly that he had run clear through the rim of a town, and was in open country again. The pursuing car was beside him in a moment.

'What do you think you're tryin' to do?' demanded the man who leaned out toward him.

'Just — just tryin' out my new car,' said Hank.

'*New* car! Have you got any brakes on that pile of junk?'

'I — I think so.' Hank hadn't thought much about brakes.

'Then why didn't you stop when I sirened?'

'I didn't hear you.'

'You must be deaf, then. How did you get a driver's license? Let's see your license.'

Hank gulped. But he saw it would be best to be frank.

'Officer,' he said, politely, 'I'll tell you the whole truth. I just bought this car today, and haven't got my driver's license yet. It's the first car I ever had, and I bought it with my own money. I just couldn't help bringing it out here and trying it out.'

'Out here?' retorted the officer. 'Do you realize that this is an incorporated city? For twelve blocks you've been going close to fifty in a twenty-five-mile zone. You've gone through three boulevard stops. After we sirened you to stop you tried to escape. You have been driving so recklessly without a license

that there is mighty little chance of your ever getting one. You were out on the road doing your best to dare other people to race with you. Under our ordinances, what you have done demands confiscation of the car, and you'll be lucky if you escape a jail term.'

Hank almost swooned. Confiscation! No license for years, maybe! It was a moment for daring and bluff, since there seemed no hope in anything else.

'Maybe you don't know who I am,' he said, warningly. 'My dad has got a lot of influence with the *Los Angeles Star*.'

The officer's eyes grew hard.

'Maybe you don't know who I am, either,' he said. 'I happen to be Chief of Police of the town you're in — fifty miles from Los Angeles!'

Hank blinked. He had to, for there were tears in his eyes. He looked imploringly at the man before him, who was not in uniform.

'It can't really be as bad as all that, can it?' he asked, hopefully. 'You're kidding me. . . . You aren't driving an official car.'

The man laughed bitterly.

'No,' he said. 'This is my night off. I was driving to a poker — er — a party at a friend's! You've come mighty near spoiling my evening.'

Hank grunted a short laugh of pain.

'What do I do now?' he asked.

The police chief was more touched than he would have been by tears.

'Kid,' he said kindly, 'you're in a bad spot. The judge in this town will soak you hard, for you're an outsider, and election is coming up. And a reckless boy driver killed a deaf old lady here last week. If I

were you, I'd slip out that side door and make my getaway through the fields before the pursuing officer gets a chance to find out who you are or what you look like.'

It was eleven-thirty when Hank got home, on foot, for he was no longer the possessor of a car.

I 8—THE VENGEANCE THAT SMITETH

THE Seymour family wasn't one of those which never exchange a cross word. Although the children were all fond of one another and proud of one another when they got the chance, they quarreled fiercely at times. Hank was a born tease, and so was John, and naturally neither of them could stand teasing very well. If Hank teased John, John felt the indignation of one who is set upon by an antagonist too big and strong to fight; and if John teased Hank, Hank felt John was taking cowardly advantage of the fact that his parents would intervene to prevent proper punishment. And each considered it a lost day when he did not succeed in teasing the other at least a little.

Therefore it was an endless chain, as each ended every day with something to avenge. For all boys are born savages, and look on revenge as not only their right but their duty.

It is not only men who have lost in love or whose consciences are greatly burdened who struggle to forget. Assign an onerous job to a lad in his teens and he will struggle to forget it even more instinctively. One day Mom ordered Hank to mow the grass. Hank knew one of the other boys would have to do it if he forgot it. He suddenly remembered that he had to see his friend Forry, baptized Forrest, on an

important matter. As he strolled away he saw John's bicycle lying in front of the house, and mounted it. Forry lived only a few blocks away, but he felt he really needed the bicycle to go that far. But John saw him and ran out.

'Hey!' roared John. 'Come back here with my bike.'

Hank pretended not to hear.

'Come back with that bike, or I'll tell Dad.'

That was one Hank could not pretend not to hear, because it suggested an infuriating answer.

'Tattletale!' he sneered.

'Come back, you great big bully!' John almost screamed, for his temper was getting near the hysterical point. He and Chuck were planning a five-mile ride to a shop in a near-by town where they could buy material for their model airplanes which they could not buy in Ourville, and he needed his bicycle.

'Aw, shut your face.'

John picked up a stone and hurled it toward Hank. It was only a gesture, for Hank was out of reach, and John knew it. But it gave Hank the excuse he had been looking for.

'Oh-ho!' he shouted. 'You throw rocks at me, do you? Well, now I *will* take your bike, for punishment. You know what Dad's said about throwin' things.'

Hank spun away, leaving John almost crying with helpless rage. The only consolation John could think of at the moment lay in the fierce pledge to himself:

'I'll get even with him, all right, all right.'

Even the fiercest pledges of boys are soon forgotten if things go pleasantly. John would do almost any-

thing for Hank when Hank was nice to him, and had Hank returned promptly with the bicycle undamaged all would have been well. But Forry, seeing Hank mounted, suggested that he get his bicycle and the two of them ride over past the Griswald estate, where they might accidentally see Helen Griswald and be invited in to play badminton or try out the new swimming pool or something. Helen was always nice when they met her, but the place overawed them. They wouldn't have thought of going in there for a visit in any conveyances less grown up than motor cars, but considered it all right to be just riding by on bicycles. They knew that young men in very beautiful cars — some of them with chauffeurs — called on Helen.

They did not see Helen, though they rode past the estate several times. But one thing led to another, as it always does when two boys get together, and hours went by. Chuck and John, impatiently waiting at home for the return of John's bike, were distressed to the point of fury, and when at last Hank came home with a flat tire, John renewed his vows of vengeance.

Hank had only recently discovered that he had ornamental hair. Always before he had cut it short and been unconscious of its existence. Then came the period which comes to most boys — and clings through life to some artistic people — when he thought he should let his hair grow long and comb it straight back, so that it would give him a streamlined effect. Of course his hair wouldn't stay that way unaided until after a year or two of training, so he was wont to plaster it down with generous quantities of Hair Fixative.

When Hank got home from a long, hard day of riding John's bike around he felt too tired to brook many insults from John, and bluntly told him to shut his trap — and, above all, not to be a tattletale.

'Well, you got to pay for havin' my tire fixed,' insisted John.

'Okay, okay, I will — some time.'

'Naw, sir, you got to do it now.'

'I haven't got time right now.'

'Well, you got to, anyway. You took my bike without permission and stayed away all day, and now you got to pay for it.'

'Then you'll have to wait till I get some money.'

With that convincing retort, Hank strode into the house, leaving John baffled, but not beaten.

'If you don't,' was his parting shot, 'I'll sure get even with you.'

Hank's intentions were good. They always were good. He had learned that it doesn't cost anything to have good intentions, and a fellow can conveniently forget to carry out those which irk him. He forgot them without effort as soon as he got inside the house, for on the mantel was a monogrammed envelope addressed to him. The wild hope that it was from Helen Griswald made tumult in his breast, but he dared not express it. He tore open the envelope and read the missive within greedily. Then he whooped.

'What has happened?' asked Mom, coming in from the kitchen. And John and Chuck stuck their heads in from the yard to make the same inquiry.

'I'm invited up to Helen Griswald's tomorrow night for a little informal party,' Hank announced, almost shouting with excitement. 'Boy, I'm beginning to step in the right crowd now.'

It was an epochal moment. Hank had met Helen at school affairs and numerous public community affairs. He had been one of the party at the Côte d'Azur Beach Club the memorable night when he first saw grunion. But never before had he been invited to the Griswald house. Indeed, very few people were invited there. Helen's uncle, Norman Griswald, was a very wealthy man, but his wife had suffered such a terrible mental shock that she had lived in retirement ever since. It was only since the coming of Helen to her uncle's home that the swimming pool had been built and the ballroom renovated. That room had not been used for two years. Most of Helen's male visitors were old men of twenty or twenty-one, and some as old as twenty-five tried to crowd into the picture. As Helen seemed the sole heir to the Griswald fortune, her picture in colors had been published on the front page of the society section of the *Los Angeles Star*. As she was a lovely girl, she had been queen of the Pasadena Tournament of Roses. And when there was some notable charity affair backed by society in Los Angeles, she was asked to be one of those in the foreground in the news photographs. Therefore everyone in Ourville — even Hank, to whom society meant nothing definite — knew that Helen Griswald was socially far above most of Ourville. Hank felt that he was being singled out and summoned for high honors.

But next day he learned that Forry, too, had been invited, and so had three or four other ordinary mortals. Evidently Helen was out to show that she was not snooty.

It somewhat reduced Hank's ego to learn that Forry had been invited, but it made him feel much more

comfortable, too. Forry's father had a nifty car, which Forry doubtless could borrow, and they could drive up to the Griswald door together. Hank had been worrying a little about walking up to it. And he didn't like the idea of facing a butler alone. Hank had never yet met a butler. He had only read somewhere that it wasn't good form to shake hands with the butler, but didn't know exactly why.

Several times during the day John tried to pin him down to some definite arrangement for having his tire repaired, but Hank couldn't be bothered. He had far more important things to think about. In the midst of whatever he had been told to do, he would stop, turn on the radio, get a swing tune, and practice a few dance steps. In the midst of his dancing he would break off to sink into deep thought over some such weighty problem as whether or not to wear a handkerchief in his breast pocket, and, if he did, should it be a white handkerchief or one that was gaily colored? He spent much of his time poring over magazine advertisements to see how the well-dressed man was attired in them. He struggled over the problem of whether to wear his white shoes or his black shoes as he never had struggled over a problem in algebra. Two or three times he dashed over to Forry's house for consultation and conference.

He and Forry even worked out some casual dialogue which would give each of them a chance to say something clever. If Helen had some of her friends from the city out for the party, Hank and Forry were going to show that they were men of the world.

He suggested that he would like to have his suit dry-cleaned and pressed, but he had learned to do that sort of thing pretty well for himself, so Mom merely

answered that seventy-five cents was seventy-five cents. He then became very modest concerning his abilities.

'Aw, Mom,' he said, 'I can't even clean it half as well as you can.'

But Mom had far too many other things to do, and he had to do his own cleaning and pressing.

In the meantime, John had finally gone to Dad with the report that Hank had taken his bike and punctured a tire, and had to pay for the necessary repairs.

'Well, I'll lend you the money for repairs,' said Dad, 'and you and Hank and I can talk this over pay-day.' That meant Saturday, when the boys got their allowances.

'Okay, Pops... And will you let me have another quarter? I need some airplane glue.'

'All right,' said Dad. 'That's fifty cents you owe me now. Remember.'

Just before dinner time John came home with his bicycle repaired and with his pockets bulging. In one pocket was a large bottle of the glue necessary for the building of model airplanes. In another was a bag of candy. That represented his change.

He was not displaying the candy, but his jaws were working. Hank noticed that, saw the top of a paper bag protruding from John's pocket, and adroitly snatched it out.

'Bites on you,' he declaimed.

'Gimme that back!' commanded John.

'Aw, I said bites on you. You got to give me a bite after that.'

That was boy law at the Ourville grammar school. Hank was going to be a man of the world that even-

ing, but he was very much a boy when there was candy in sight.

But John still harbored resentment.

'Gimme that back!' he demanded again, fiercely.

Hank hadn't intended to do more than tease John. It was so easy to tease John. But if John was going to get threatening about it he might as well demand his rights under the letter of the unwritten law. He had said 'Bites on you,' and the proper thing for John to do was submit gracefully.

'I don't really want your candy,' he announced, 'but I'll have to take a little bite just for the principle of the thing.'

From the bag he took a large square of candy known as a 'Honey Babe' and bit off one corner of it, while John glowered.

'I'll get even with you, all right,' he pledged.

'Yeah,' said Hank, tauntingly. 'Phooey to you.'

John glared a moment, then turned and ran upstairs, as if no longer able to control his feelings. He went into the bathroom and locked the door. Hank laughed.

'Afraid he's going to cry,' he said.

Immediately after dinner Hank began his preparations for the party. He polished his shoes until even the heels shone. Then he laid out his clothes as a valet would have laid them out. Next he bathed as a boy never bathed before — at least, not that boy — paying vigorous attention to neck, ears, and fingernails. Even the tan on his forearm had to prove itself genuine by withstanding a scrubbing which almost took part of the skin. And then Hank shampooed the long hair he loved to comb back in a streamlined

pompadour which reached to the crown of his head.

Never before had he shampooed it so thoroughly, or rinsed it so many times. At last he felt sure that nothing but fine silk was left, and vigorously applied the towel. But he never had been very patient about toweling long hair. After a few moments of brisk toweling he decided to let the hair dry while he attended to other weighty matters.

Then he went through the motions of shaving. What he got off his face was mostly lather and imagination, but it took him longer to shave than it usually took Dad, and when he finished he felt he had a skin you'd love to touch. It was cool and soft, yet aglow with youth and excitement.

He would leave his hair to the last, for that, he thought, was his crowning glory. He dressed as painstakingly as might a prima donna. When he had only his coat to put on, he got to work on his beloved hair. From the bathroom he brought his bottle of Hair Fixative. He noted with satisfaction that there was more in the bottle than he had thought there was. He had feared he might not have enough for hair as long and as thick as his was. He would be liberal with it tonight, for it never showed on the hair, no matter how much one used. It merely made hair behave, and stay where it was put.

He applied the Hair Fixative generously, rubbing it in to the roots. He wished to be sure that no wisp of hair escaped unsaturated by it.

When he combed his hair it was wet and heavy, much wetter than he thought it should be. He must have left too much water in it. However, he couldn't rub it with a towel now, or he would rub out all the Hair Fixative. It would dry in a few minutes.

Outside he heard a honk and a long whistle. Could that be Forry already? He looked out the window and was astounded to see that it was dark. He had not realized he was taking a long time to dress.

It was light enough, though, to see that Forry had borrowed his father's car, so they could drive up in style. Everything was going well. It looked like a lucky night.

'Just a sec,' he called to Forry.

'Make it snappy,' urged Forry, by way of conventional reply.

He made it snappy. He combed his hair quickly. It was so damp that it parted perfectly and lay down smoothly. It was so damp, in fact, that beads of moisture crept down on his forehead and the back of his neck and around his ears. But he knew that as soon as it dried it would fluff up a little and look like glistening silk. He wasn't worried. He slipped on his coat, shot one last look into the mirror, and dashed downstairs — leaving all his discarded clothes scattered about his room.

He was in such a hurry that he had no time to ask to borrow Dad's hat. He assumed it would be all right, and borrowed it without asking. He had never owned a hat. Once Hank had had a cap, but discarded it as soon as the novelty wore off. Sometimes in summer he wore an eyeshade. But he had never had any use for a hat until he had got to worrying about his hair. On special occasions he had always been able to borrow Dad's.

Now he planted the hat most carefully on his head, so it would not blow off and yet would not spoil the artistic effect he had achieved with his hair. Then he hurried out to Forry.

As he swooped out the front door John, who had been observing him keenly throughout the few moments after he came downstairs, grinned and said:

‘He’ll find out.’

The clock in the car showed it was only seven-thirty. Hank pointed to it.

‘And you’re telling me to make it snappy!’ he complained.

‘Well, I came early because I knew how you dawdle and doll yourself up.’

‘Huh! I’m no more dolled up than you are.’

‘Tell me! You’re out to make Helen forget all about those city guys.’

‘Well, a feller’s got to do his bit for the old home town. But we don’t want to get there too early. It’s awful unfashionable to get to places too early.’

‘She said eight o’clock. We’ll only be a few minutes early.’

‘We mustn’t be a single minute early... Besides, I just washed my hair, and want it to dry out a bit. Let’s ride around so’s we can be just a few minutes late.’

‘Okay,’ agreed Forry. ‘We’ll drive around sort of casual and maybe give some of the guys and girls that ain’t invited an eyeful.’

That was such an excellent suggestion that they cruised about for forty minutes, and were twenty minutes late when they drew up in the Griswald grounds. They found the driveway lined with cars, indicating that they were the most fashionably late of all.

Hank felt almost giddy. His head actually felt

queer. He supposed it was because he was so unused to wearing a hat. Maybe excitement had sort of made it swell. Anyhow, that drive had dried his hair even though he had kept his hat on tightly to keep wind from blowing it. He knew he was looking his best, and once he got into that mansion he was sure he would be at ease.

Confidently he strode up to the door, leading the now diffident Forry by a good two feet. It was a time to be bold, to be assured, to be a leader. He rang, and so quickly that it took his breath away the door was opened by a gentleman in evening dress. Golly, wasn't it an informal party, after all?

Then he realized that this was the butler. He still couldn't understand why the servants wore evening clothes when the guests didn't, but he wasn't going to weaken. He strode past the butler and stared into the magnificent room into which the noble hallway opened. Then he felt fully reassured. None of the young men present was 'dressed.'

Helen was chatting with one of those city guys, but she was looking toward that door. Immediately she excused herself and came forward to greet him — and, of course, Forry. But he had forgotten Forry for the moment. He had forgotten himself, too. He was reminded of that by the butler's gentle suggestion:

'May I take your hat, sir?'

With a smothered gasp of apology, he snatched at his hat. But it wouldn't come off. It was stuck!

Horrificed, he yanked hard. His long hair lifted, letting his hat leave his head, but it could go no farther than a few inches. It was tethered.

Someone in the room beyond tittered. Someone else laughed out loud. Helen, who had started to say,

most graciously: 'I was afraid you weren't ——' suddenly stopped to gaze at him in perplexity.

He yanked furiously. His hat bobbed up and down on his head like a jack-in-the-box. He jerked until it hurt. But the hat wouldn't come off.

He knew he was the cynosure of all eyes. He had been standing where two or three of those in the room beyond could see him, and their amused interest had made others move so that they could see his act.

Hank gropingly put a hand on his hair. Then he froze with horror. Around the neck, where the hair was short, he was sheathed in something hard, something which felt like marble where it was smooth and like a nutmeg grater where it wasn't.

Bewilderment gave place to a flash of understanding, and that gave place to consternation. He had felt something like that before. And now he remembered an odor to which he had paid no attention at the time.

He gave another despairing wrench at his hat, but it would not come off. A loud laugh greeted that effort, for by now everyone at the party was watching Hank. He was putting on some sort of a show. It was interesting because they couldn't understand it, and it really was funny. Curiosity had brought them all to their feet.

Their laughter almost upset Hank's reason for a moment. He glared at his audience, gritted his teeth, and wrenched again. He only succeeded in pulling his hair so hard it made him distort his face and wink back tears. That made the spectators roar.

'Aw, to thunder with you all!' roared Hank, and turned and fled.

He heard Forry call after him. He heard excited questions: 'What's the matter?' 'Has he gone crazy?' 'Is he being funny or what?' He knew that the guests had crowded to the great door to watch his flight. But there was nothing he could say, nothing he could do except flee. For now he knew what had happened. John had got even. John had mixed airplane glue, the stuff that hardens like iron, with his Hair Fixative.

I 9—THE FLIGHT TO GLORY

CHUCK was an unusually conscientious boy about most things, but it seemed to Dad that he frittered away a lot of time making model airplanes.

'You're fourteen years old now,' he reminded Chuck, on frequent occasions. 'You mustn't put in all your life playing with toys. Why, when you're making a plane we can call you to meals, or to run an errand, or to do anything, and you always answer "Just a sec," and that's the last we hear from you until we call again. You must realize that life isn't made up of toys.'

During one of those lectures, Chuck listened respectfully, and yet seemed a little bemused. But his reply threw Dad back on his haunches mentally.

'Isn't it?' Chuck asked.

It wasn't said impudently. It seemed that it was said gropingly, and it almost stunned Dad for a moment. What was his own business, which he took so seriously, but playing with toys — and imaginary toys at that? What was the business of the banker or the broker but playing with toys, except that they used round pieces of silver or square pieces of paper instead of tin soldiers and paper dolls? And how often a doctor who cut people up was playing with toys, too. Every man who got absorbed in and fascinated by his business was playing a game, and if

most of them knew it, the struggle and thrill and risk of the game was what they wanted more than anything else. He wondered if Chuck had been profound, or had merely been thinking of something else, and hadn't realized what he was saying.

However, Dad had never seen anybody else who could get as utterly absorbed in his game as Chuck did. Once, just as a test, he shouted up the stairway:

'Chuck! Chuck! The house is afire! Quick! Quick!'

But Chuck's slow voice came back, as it always did, respectful but unhurried:

'Just a sec.'

It was some minutes before Chuck opened the door. He had spent the time gathering the things he must save. And his disgust could not be concealed when he learned that the alarm had been a hoax. He said nothing, but he looked at Dad as if sad to learn that Dad played with *that* kind of toy.

But he immediately returned to his room and his work, for he was trying to build a special plane for the Model-Plane Circus at the Pasadena Rose Bowl. It was to be the biggest show of model planes ever held in Southern California, and the honor of winning a prize there — Ah! that was something to dream about!

Chuck didn't admit to anyone that he dreamed of winning a prize there. And he did not think of the prizes themselves. It was the glory of winning in such competition which bemused him. That would be demonstration that he was on the right track, that his work was more than good. He knew boys of eighteen and twenty and even men in their thirties who were going to exhibit planes in that show. He

knew that many of the plane-builders, the experts from the great airplane factories, would be there. It was they who were promoting the show, not merely to educate the young to be patrons of their plane lines but because they were in quest of new ideas. If they could inspire ten thousand experimenters to work hard, a few of them might develop ideas worth considering.

There was a class for boys over twelve years old and under fifteen in which Chuck yearned to enter a plane if he only dared. It was a class for rubber-powered models, not for those driven by gasoline motors.

The winner of that contest would receive the Moseley medal for the best original idea contributed to the show. The boy who wore that medal could visit any airplane factory and be a welcome guest. He would be in line, when he got a little older, for a job with one of them. And Chuck believed he had originality. Since he was eleven years old he had been able to work from blueprints, and now he had such understanding of the reasons why this and that was done that he often improved on the plans, producing planes which looked better and flew better than would planes built precisely as the plans directed.

Chuck was saving all his nickels to buy a gas-model. Besides the medal, the prize in that contest was to be the finest of gas-models.

So he was surprised one day when he and John were hailed by Edward Willis, who was passing in a car driven by a chauffeur. That made the Seymour boys stare, for the Willises had never had a chauffeur before.

'Hey, Chuck,' greeted Edward, 'are you going to enter a plane in the Rose Bowl tournament?'

Chuck looked at him analytically.

'Oh, I might,' he admitted.

'Why don't you?' asked Edward. 'You might win a prize.'

There was a hint of challenge and mockery in his voice. It was almost patronizing. And certainly it was puzzling. For Chuck knew Edward didn't wish him to win a prize in that show.

'Why don't you enter?' Chuck countered.

'Oh,' replied Edward, with easy confidence, 'I'm going to.'

Chuck could not conceal his surprise. Chuck had demonstrated many times that he was a far better builder of planes than Edward was. Indeed, there were a dozen boys in Ourville who could build much better. Edward's mother had given him everything to work with, and they all envied him. But when it came to personal ability he was always too conceited, too unwilling to labor painstakingly, and too unwilling to do things over.

Edward saw the surprise on Chuck's face, and chose to take it as an affront.

'Yes,' he announced, 'and what's more I'm betting that my plane outflies yours.'

'What you gointa fly, a gas-model?'

'Yes, but I'm going to fly rubber planes, too.... And I'd just like to make a little bet with you. I'm entitled to some revenge for that dog race.'

Chuck and John grinned happily at the memory of the dog race, but it clearly was a bitter memory to Edward.

'Oh, I'm not even sure I'm gonna enter,' said Chuck.

'Drive on, Evans,' said Edward disdainfully to the chauffeur.

He left the Seymour boys staring and wondering. They wouldn't have said 'Drive on, Evans.' They would have said 'Drive on, Mr. Evans,' for the chauffeur was a man at least twenty-five years old.

'It's gone to his head,' explained John, reasonably. 'He thinks he's a big shot because he's got a show-fure. He'll find out.'

That determined Chuck to enter, though. If Edward Willis could see a chance to win, there surely should be a chance for Chuck.

The contest was two weeks away, and those two weeks were busy ones for most of the boys in Ourville. Practically every boy in town was stirred by thoughts of a prize, a trophy or an honor to be won at the Model-Plane Circus, and lads who had never built planes before were inspired to try. The half dozen or so who had been enthusiasts for several years openly admitted they would compete, but many another lad was cherishing secret dreams and working diligently in the secrecy of a garage or a basement.

Yet each of the builders withheld something. Each cherished some secret which his competitors might not discover until the day of the competitions.

Gossip and rumors swept the boy world. Some of the rumors were terrifying but some were heartening. Boys who ordinarily had to be pried out of bed got up early in hope of trying out their planes before other boys were abroad, and other boys got up early to spy on them. Sometimes a boy who had tried to be secretive came rushing out of his sequestered place and across fields and through yards in pursuit of a model which was leading him on in the wrong di-

rection. And sometimes a boy who had to climb a tree after a model found himself surrounded by interested spectators when he got down.

The village mystery, though, lay in the cocksure confidence of Edward Willis. It was known that he intended to compete in both the gas-model and rubber-powered classes, but nobody got to see the tryouts of his planes. Now that the Willises had a chauffeur, it was easy for him to go so far from home to make his trials that pursuit was impracticable.

Then came the news that Mrs. Willis was making up a party to attend the Model-Plane Circus. She had invited enough people to make a six-car caravan to drive to Pasadena for the circus, then picnic in Brookside Park and then take in the Pasadena Flower Show. And she had invited Mrs. Gale and Marion to go in her own car.

That was the first report which seriously disturbed Chuck Seymour. He realized that such a party must be arranged because of a conviction that Edward Willis would score a triumph.

He wished, too, that Marion wasn't going over in that particular car.

The Rose Bowl, which holds nearly ninety thousand people, was more than one-third full the Saturday afternoon of the Model-Plane Circus. Even Gregory Seymour was there. He still thought Chuck was getting a little old for the building of toys, but he believed in competitions. If a boy didn't learn to put forth his best in competition he never could give his best, for life is all made up of competitions. So he hired Blev Wilson, who had no job and no place to go, and therefore felt he had to have a car, to take

the whole family over. Frank and Sylvia had to sit on laps, but neither ever sat still long enough to grow heavy to the person providing the lap. And a day in Pasadena was always worth while, even if the excuse for going there was only child's play.

When he got to the Rose Bowl he could hardly believe his eyes. What were all those hundreds — those thousands — of grownups doing there? Some of them, of course, were doting parents like himself. But there were many young men in their twenties. There was a young professor from the California Institute of Technology whom he knew, a scientist who knew so much Dad couldn't follow him in even a conversation about the weather. But there he was with a gas-model plane in his hands, which he was going to fly in the competitions! Walter Brookins, first pupil of the Wright brothers and first stunt flyer in the world, was there. Ruth Elder, first woman to attempt to fly the Atlantic, and still young and pretty, was there. Howard Hughes, who had just established a record for speed, was there. And so were executives of all the air transport companies.

A thrill of pride and pity shivered through Dad. Chuck was indeed daring if he competed in such company. But the poor little chap couldn't stand much chance against some of those competitors.

Competitors with planes in their cars had been allowed to drive inside the Bowl and park on the far side of the field. As the Seymours parked they saw Mrs. Morgan Waltham Willis and her party. The chauffeur and Edward were getting two planes out of the car, and Chuck's eyes fixed on them in wonder.

'Boy!' he exclaimed. 'He never built those planes ... Gee! They're swell jobs!'

'Huh!' said John. 'They may look swell but they won't fly. I never saw any plane of Eddie's yet would fly worth a darn.'

Chuck looked puzzled and gloomy.

'Don't lose your nerve,' said Dad. 'Many a cat that can whip two dogs allows itself to be treed by one.'

Edward and the chauffeur got the planes out on the ground. One was a gas-model plane. But the one Chuck noticed especially was a rubber-powered plane which looked bigger and better than any model plane he had ever seen before. It had appurtenances which he couldn't understand, and he thought he knew all about such models.

He wasn't the only person who was attracted. Quite a crowd gathered to look at the two planes. One man with an official badge on strode through the crowd.

'Why, hello, Evans,' he said to the chauffeur. 'Still at it, are you?'

The chauffeur looked up and grinned.

'Oh, no,' he said. 'I'm all through. I'm just working for this young gentleman's mother now, and came out to see him fly his planes.'

'I see,' said the official. 'Well, you've certainly got a good pupil. That looks mighty like the plane you won the world's championship with years ago. That must have been seven years. We timed that plane of yours as flying forty-seven minutes, didn't we?'

'Yes, Mr. Moseley. That's what it flew.'

'But what did you quit the game for? I thought you'd be working in some big plane factory by now.'

'That's what I thought, too. But I never was able to get a job in one. So I had to take up drivin' cars for a livin'.'

Chuck listened with fists clenching. He thought he saw it all. That must be Frizzy Evans, of whom he had read in the *Model Aircraft Engineer*. Evans could say that Edward had built those planes, and there was nothing to do about it, but Chuck thought he knew that Evans had been the real builder. And what chance had his funny little plane, with a lot of ideas of his own in it, against a plane built by Frizzy Evans? And Frizzy had been eighteen when he built that plane seven years before. It wasn't fair for a plane he had even helped on to compete with planes built by boys under fifteen.

He went back to the car and started to fling his plane into it. But John caught his arm.

'Don't!' cried John. 'You'll bust it.'

'I don't care,' said Chuck. 'I'm not goin' to fly it.'

'Oh, surely!' said Dad. 'After we've all come all the way over here?'

'What would be the use? I got no chance.'

Mom put a hand on his shoulder.

'We don't care about all the other planes, Chuckie,' she said. 'We all came over here just to see yours fly. Dad's taken a day off and hired a car just for that. Go on and fly it.'

'Oh, okay,' said Chuck. But his voice was hopeless.

'That gas-model crate of Edward's ain't so hot,' said John consolingly. 'I bet Bob Leonard's or the Wynne boys' or Bob Thomas's'll beat it all to pieces.'

'No,' said Chuck bitterly. 'They didn't build gas-models in Frizzy Evans's day. But that rubber-motored model of his is certainly a hon.'

'The wind's just right for yours, Chuck,' said Frank. 'If it climbs up there high it'll glide and glide, an' may fool 'em all.'

It was nearly an hour before the contest for rubber-powered planes built by boys under fifteen was called. And then there were fewer entries than they had expected. So many of the better plane builders had become gas-model builders that the competition was largely limited to boys who could not afford gas-motors.

The public address system blared out the names of the contestants alphabetically, one at a time. As each contestant put his plane in the air the timers clicked their stop watches, and for a little while that one contestant and his plane were the center of all eyes. Both distance and time in the air were to count.

Some of the planes flew only a hundred feet or so. Some flew a thousand feet. A few flew clear out of the great stadium, and the timers had to run up to the top of it to keep track of them.

A contestant named Sellers was called. His plane was one of those which circled gracefully about the field and then shot away over the top of the stadium. It flew so beautifully that the more excited spectators rushed after the timekeepers to watch its flight from the top of the stadium. It flew into a tree on a hill half a mile from the Bowl.

'Oh, boy!' cried Chuck, who was one of those who had rushed to the top, 'if it hadn't been for that hill ——'

'Hey, guy!' interrupted John. 'They're yellin' your name.'

'Charles Seymour!' bawled the public address system. 'The next contestant is Charles Seymour, fourteen and one half years old.'

Chuck bounded down the tiers and tiers of seats. But it was a long way back. Before he could get down on the field the public address system barked:

'Wallace Taylor will be the next contestant. Wallace Taylor!'

Chuck laughed bitterly. That was the end of his little dream.

The contest went on until at last Edward Willis was called.

Edward was excited. He felt sure his plane would win, and was impatient for victory. He wound the plane up with a patent winder, but forgot to keep track of the number of turns he gave it. When he realized the error he was making, he guessed at the number. He did not wish to admit his oversight, and grew a little flustered. So when he let the plane go he did not give it a good start.

It swooped down as if it were going to strike the earth. But it was too good a plane for that. It rose to a height of about fifteen feet and swept around the Bowl, completing a circle of about a quarter of a mile. Very slowly it gained altitude and circled the arena again. And then, on its third sweep around the Bowl, it straightened out.

It was flying beautifully, but it had not gained altitude enough. It was only about fifty or perhaps sixty feet above the earth, and the tiers of seats rose higher than that. It still had plenty of power to carry it far. If it gained altitude enough to clear the rim of the Bowl it would stand a good chance to win. It was gaining altitude a little. It looked as if it had gained enough to go over, but it would be very close. It was sailing superbly now. The crowd watched breathlessly, ready to cheer.

And then it crashed, on the top rim of the Bowl. Two inches more altitude would have lifted it over,

but the lack of two inches made it dash into the concrete with such force that its whole underpinning crumbled.

Edward turned furiously to Evans, the chauffeur.

'You're fired,' he sneered. 'You promised it would fly at least twenty minutes.'

'I guess that must be all,' Dad said. 'Shall we start home now, to get out of the crowd?'

'Wait for Hank,' said Mom. 'He's over there at the judges' booth, for some reason.'

They knew the reason in a moment. The public address blared again:

'There is one more contestant. Charles Seymour wasn't ready when his turn was called. Are you ready now, Charles Seymour?'

Chuck could hardly believe his ears. But John thrust his plane into his hands. And he ran out on the field, shouting:

'Yes, I'm ready.'

But he did not hurry then. He took an automatic winder and adjusted it carefully. Then he forgot the crowd and everything else as he counted the winds. Four hundred and ninety! That was right. He touched a finger to his tongue and held it up to feel the wind. He balanced the plane carefully in one hand, feeling the way the wind caught it as he pushed it through the air. He was careful to point the nose precisely right. And then he sent it sailing.

In a second it was more than twenty feet above the ground. Then it began to spiral upward.

'That's a pretty crate,' said one of the plane company engineers who was watching. 'Different, too. I'd like to look at that plane.'

'Look at it gain altitude!' exclaimed his companion.

The plane spiraled steadily upward, in circles about one hundred feet in diameter. It was a hundred feet above the ground now, and still climbing. Now it was two hundred feet up. And then it straightened out of one of its graceful curves and flew straight over the rim of the Bowl, straight over the hill where another good plane had caught in a tree, straight out of sight and out of Chuck's life forever.

The two airplane engineers who had been talking of the plane rushed out of the Bowl and leaped in their car to pursue it. But by that time it had disappeared beyond a foothill of Mount Wilson, and there was no hope.

But Chuck didn't mind. He was standing there in a trance, when he heard the public address announce:

'Ladies and gentlemen, the best was the last. Charles Seymour is unanimously judged to have won first prize in this event, and the Moseley medal. Step up to the judges' booth, Charles, and let us decorate you.'

Chuck didn't hear the applause. He couldn't hear anything, because of the sound like the thunder of surf in his ears. He didn't know, then, that all those people were applauding him. He was so dazed that Hank and John had to lead him, had to take his arms and almost push him to the judges' booth. But he knew that the world was very, very beautiful and good.

And he did happen to notice that nobody in the Willis car was showing much enthusiasm except Marion Gale, who was waving her handkerchief at him.

20—THE GREAT AWAKENING

ALL this time, Dad had never got around to writing a novel. He had started twenty times, but every time something happened which either distracted him mentally or harassed him financially so that he had to lay the notes away to wait a more propitious moment.

And frequently the cause of his worries was Hank.

Hank was so annoying that Mom and Dad had to take turns at losing their temper with him, as neither could have borne the strain of the continual job alone. Hank was a natural spring of mischief, adventure, and romance. He wouldn't take either his chores at home or his lessons at school seriously. If on the way to school, on a chill and drizzly day, he saw a billboard advertisement declaring 'The Sun is Shining at Palm Springs,' he suddenly would feel it his duty to go there and find out if that were true. It seemed to him that scientific investigation of that sort was more important than school, and that might be the last the family heard of him until he telephoned or telegraphed (collect) from some place more than one hundred miles away. One day when he was only fourteen he had started to school, but something he heard about Denver made him think he would learn more by going there. The Seymours were almost frantic until a deputy sheriff nearly two hundred miles out on the Mojave Desert telephoned that he

had picked a fourteen-year-old boy who claimed to be their son out of a box car. That was before Hank had learned to telegraph collect, to keep Mom from worrying.

It often was hard for Dad to know whether he ought to whip the tar out of Hank or call in a psychoanalyst.

Hank seemed to lack sticktoitiveness until he was sixteen. Then he decided he should smoke, and showed a perseverance and courage which were impressive. Neither illness nor punishment would stop him.

Yet, despite his numerous imbecilities, Hank was exceedingly intelligent. His mind worked when many another mind was taking a rest. Though he teased, he was likely to surprise his smaller brothers and sister by unexpected generosity and kindness. One couldn't help liking him, although often one wished to kick him.

It was one of the times when Mom felt he should be kicked that she went to Dad's workroom and said:

'I'm sorry to disturb you, Greg, but you're going to have to speak to Hank.'

'Well,' admitted Dad, 'that would be a change — after yelling at him all these years.'

'That's just what I mean,' said Mom. 'We have been giving him orders, stern commands which we soon forget ourselves because of the pressure of other things. He has got into the habit, now, of saying "Okay" and then trusting we will forget. If we can get hold of the good and the sweet and the loyal in his nature he'll be a great man.'

'Oh, yes,' agreed Dad, 'he has brains all right — if he only had the horse sense to use them.'

'Well,' urged Mom, 'you can make your characters in stories do anything you wish them to. Why, lots of people read the stories to get psychological hints. Why can't you bring that psychology to bear on your son? And maybe you should try some of it on yourself.'

Dad stared at her, but Mom went on:

'Try to see him as if he were a fiction character. Maybe if you talk to Hank like an author instead of like a father you can overcome the handicap of relationship and get down to real understanding.'

Dad continued to stare, but a light was dawning in his eyes.

'My dear,' he said, with the surprise a man nearly always feels when he suddenly realizes his wife is smarter than he is, 'I believe you have made a great discovery. I have been a P.F. too long.'

'Oh, no, dear,' said Mom generously, 'I wouldn't say you'd been a D.F. very often.'

'I said P.F.,' Dad corrected her with dignity. 'That stands for proud father. Because I have been proud of Hank's good qualities I have lost patience and been furious at him for the silly ones which keep him from being what he should. I haven't got hold of him in just the right way. I think you have inspired me to a great idea. It's strange that nobody ever thought of it before.'

Mom looked a little startled.

'That sounds — er — radical,' she said.

'It's a complete revolution,' agreed Dad. 'Listen! For countless centuries fathers have been talking to their sons like fathers. But only the Japanese have ever got away with it, if they have. In this country ancestor worship has been a flat failure. Our histori-

ans are too truthful and our youngsters are too bright. We try to hide all our weaknesses, cover our defects. We try to make our sons think that when we were children we wouldn't dream of doing the things we scold them for doing. Then their eyes open and they realize we are mere whited sepulchers, mere conventional liars.'

'I still don't follow you very clearly,' confessed Mom.

'Well, instead of talking to Hank like a father I'm going to talk to him as no father ever did. Did you ever notice that preachers' sons are often bad while the sons of drunkards rarely drink? My dear, I'm going to hold myself up to Hank as a horrible example.'

Mom looked dubious, but Dad had the temperament of the creative worker. He always thought any new idea was a good one. He was full of enthusiasm. He wished to experiment without delay. He strode out to call Hank.

Mom discreetly decided not to be party to the interview.

Hank was in his room, stretched on his bed and reading. Dad did not shout, but walked upstairs and knocked on the door. When he spoke his voice was so full of import that Hank's curiosity was aroused.

'Please come down to my office at once,' Dad said.

To his own surprise, as well as Dad's, Hank did not respond with 'Just a sec.' He shot one questioning glance at his father, closed his book, and joined him. They went downstairs together, with Dad's left arm about Hank's shoulders.

Dad did not speak again until he was in his office,

with the door shut, and both were comfortably seated. Then Dad filled his pipe and passed the tobacco to Hank. It was the first time he had ever done that. Clearly, this was to be a man-to-man talk.

'Son,' said Dad, at last, 'you're nearly seventeen, and bigger than I am. You are just at the age where you may take the turn to greatness, or can begin to ruin your life. I know just exactly what you are facing now, because I went through it all at your age. It is because you are so much the same kind of boy that I was that I lose patience with you. And I wish you to profit by my experience.'

'Dad, you're not going to destroy my illusions, are you?'

'Yes, I am. A good many parents try to make their sons believe that they, in their youth, were demigods — that they never did this, never did that, always worked hard, were a great help to their parents, and never got into trouble. That isn't true. The main trouble with the rising generation is that it is the descendant of all the other generations.'

'Were you really like me?'

'When I was your age I was just like you. I had a good, strong body, an alert, inquiring mind, some appreciation of the beautiful and the artistic, and every bit as good a chance as John D. Rockefeller had to make myself a success.'

'Wow!' murmured Hank. 'Think of the car I might ——'

Dad smiled sadly.

'Yes,' he said, 'I often think of the many, many things we might have had — had I been wise enough, at your age, to start making the most of what I had. Besides having a strong body, I was a clever boxer.'

I was extremely fast, either on the cinder track or in the boxing arena. Had I never learned to smoke — had I never learned to drink — had I never done any of the things which coaches and trainers ban — had I kept on building up my strength, speed, and agility, I easily could have become one of this country's great athletes. And had I wished I could have gone into the prize ring and become very rich — perhaps a champion and a millionaire!

'Gee! Were you that good, Dad?'

'I had all the makings, my boy, just as you have all the makings. But what did I do with them? I squandered them. I wished to learn to smoke. I wished to learn about all the mysteries of life. I was just your age when I saw my first — that is, when I saw — a wine room. That was what they used to call the rooms back of saloons. Three of us boys, who wouldn't be allowed in a saloon, thought going to that wine room was a wonderful and thrilling adventure. Between us we bought half a pint of port wine, and we were all afraid to drink it for fear it would make us drunk. We sipped it so slowly that it took us more than half an hour to empty a little glass. Each of us contrived to spill some of it when the others, he thought, weren't looking.... While we were there a woman with painted cheeks and short skirts passed through the room. We were all terribly scared, but all swaggered. We all wished that, without the others knowing it, we could change that wine, which we didn't like, for an ice-cream soda. We were all eager to get away from that place. But none of us dared show it.'

'What happened?' asked Hank, unaffectedly interested.

'We left as soon as we could, and never breathed easily until we got out of that neighborhood.'

'I see,' said Hank. 'This is an official report, not candid camera.'

'The thing I wish to impress on you,' said Dad severely, 'is the fact that we went out of our way, and spent money, of which we had very little, in pursuit of trouble. Instead of safeguarding my splendid health and fine physical prowess, I actually suffered to learn to smoke and drink, so that I might injure them. I endured hardships and paid what was for me a heavy price in actual cash to acquire habits which would make me soft and flabby instead of keen and hard; which would weaken my will power instead of build it up into a conquering force. Instead of being something great I am simply ordinary and commonplace — and it is my fault for wasting much of what nature gave me.'

'Oh, you've done as well as the average, Dad.'

'That's just it, my boy. I have made myself merely average instead of outstanding — instead of great. We all admire greatness. We all wish we could be great. But we wish to be great without self-discipline, which is impossible.'

'But mere physique isn't so important as many other things. I mentioned my physical prowess only because you are a great reader of the sports pages. Take the matter of business success, though. Had I started to be industrious and thrifty when I was your age, do you imagine I could be as hard pressed for money as I always am now? Why, my boy, real thrift would have made me far more prosperous at twenty-five than I am now, or may ever be. Real thrift would have built me up into a financier. But instead I am

merely shabby-genteel. Your mother, you children, all of us have to go without things we really should have, many and many a time.'

'But how can you be sure, Dad? I know a lot of people who have been stingy all their lives and haven't anything but headaches to show for it.'

'Well, my lad, I have a creative mind. I have imagination. I have intelligence. I've met a lot of great financiers, and always had to admit that they weren't in my class intellectually. No, my son, I am confident that had I been systematic, had I been zealous in my efforts to achieve financial success, I should have been a great financial figure by now. With my natural gifts, I should be able to buy you a motor car, say, as casually as I buy myself a nickel cigar. I should be able to send you to Europe, if I thought that would benefit you, as easily as now I can give you street-car fare.'

'Gee, Dad, that would be swell!'

'But those are only minor things,' Dad cried, warming up to his subject so that his voice vibrated. 'Mere strength or mere money are nothing to what any normal man could make of himself, if he started early and was systematic. You go to a marvelous school. But do you try to get the most out of it, or do you try to escape all the education and culture you can possibly dodge? I can only tell you what I did, dear fellow. I often cut classes in which teachers were doing their utmost to teach me things which would have benefited me all my life. I dodged every lesson I could, not realizing I was dodging what was more precious than gold. I got the lessons I couldn't dodge in the laziest possible manner. I acquired the shirking habit, the saddest handicap any man can carry through

life. In short, I did my best to waste the very years which should have been the foundation for a great career.

‘Had I turned to science then, my boy, I could have been a great scientist, probably a Nobel prize winner, long before now. Had I applied my talents to engineering, and made the most of them, I might now have some such everlasting monument as Boulder Dam to my credit. Had I even become a devout student of the one thing which interested me most, the writing game, I would by now have been a worldwide figure instead of just a little fellow who has never written anything but a few short stories which are entertainment for an unthinking few today and something to wrap up a lunch in tomorrow. I have the talents, dear boy — every man has the talents — which, if he will but make the most of them, will enable him to live greatly, and perhaps create something which will influence all future time, something which will be “a light unto eternity.”’

Seymour’s voice had grown deep with feeling and his soul was in his eyes. He arose from his chair, put both hands on Hank’s shoulders, and looked into his face with all the earnestness, all the pleading, all the eager desire to transmit inspiration, that could thrill him. His voice was low and steady, but vibrant with a quality which came straight from the heart, and seemed to go straight to the heart.

‘Oh, my boy,’ he cried, ‘others may say that I have done my best, but I know that not one man in a million does his best. I know how I have wasted opportunities, have wasted strength, have wasted moral fiber, have wasted the will power which is the one

thing which can make men great. And I do not wish you to waste yours as I have done. I know what I might have done and how miserably I have failed to make the most of my qualities. I want you, dear lad, to go on to greatness — to go on and be the man I might have been had I been able to see as much, at your age, as I can see now!

Hank was deeply touched. Through Dad's entire speech he had seemed as if spellbound. He had not let his eyes and his interest wander as they usually did when Dad spoke to him seriously. He had not once tried to interrupt or change the subject, as he usually did. He looked into Dad's eyes with an earnestness which was something new. Dad believed he was witnessing an awakening. And as Dad concluded the boy's eyes filled with sympathetic tears.

Impulsively he flung out his arms and put them on his father's shoulders. There was fondness in his face and in the pressure of his hands. And when he spoke his voice, too, was deep and earnest, full of the pleading and yet the faith of the exhorter.

'Don't be discouraged, Dad,' he said. 'You've still got twenty-five good years ahead of you. Just start in now, and you may amount to something yet before you die.'

Dad's hands relaxed and he sank into his chair. He stared at Hank wonderingly.

'You may go now,' he said, weakly, 'and — and we can both think it over.'

A few minutes after Hank went out Mom slipped in.

'Well,' she asked concernedly, 'how did it work?'

'My dear,' said Dad, 'that boy has just taught me the greatest lesson of my life — the lesson that now

is the time to start. He gave me a lecture which nearly every parent under seventy should hear. He showed me, in one blinding lightning flash, what is wrong with young America.'

'What is it?' asked Mom.

'It's a long story. But tomorrow morning, my dear, I am going to arise at six. I will take a half-hour walk and get to work by seven. From seven until eight each morning I am going to work on my book, the book I have been going to write for twenty years. At eight I will stop for breakfast and then take up my daily job of making a living.'

'But can you write a book, one hour a day?'

'I can start. And I can keep on. That's what Hank taught me. Twenty-five years is a long time. Any man on earth can remake his life in twenty-five years if he starts now.'

'But have you an idea to start on?'

'Well, we came here to write the great American novel, and all we have done is raise the great American family. Maybe there's a story in the family.'

'But it's just like every other family.'

'I hope so. That gives me a chance for a story to touch all humanity, to isolate and magnify a bit of universal truth. Boy, what Hank has done for me! I have lost twenty years of time because I never had time to start, and I could have made time to start any day. Two hundred and fifty words a day, every day for a year, will make a book-length story. At last, Mrs. Seymour, we are really going to town. We are really going to write that story.'

And this, dear reader, is the story.